

AN ALL-NEW, BONE-CHILLING NOVEL BASED ON THE TERRIFYING FILMS!

# HALLOWEEN

## THE SCREAM FACTORY

Michael Myers  
is up to his  
old tricks—  
and it'll be  
a treat.



KELLY O'ROURKE

## *This can't be happening!*

The moon was the only light Matt had to get him through the thick woods of Haddonfield.

His heart pounded as he moved as quickly as possible through the dense trees. The pain in his ankle was excruciating now as he stumbled along. He tried, without much luck, to erase the horrifying image of Michael Myers from his mind as he ventured farther into the blackness of the forest. The dead eyes behind the mask seemed to be watching, following.

*Keep going! Keep running!*

No longer able to see the moon through the trees, Matt stopped. He tried to get back his sense of direction.

*Where am I?*

Nothing made any sense right now.

That's when he heard the noise behind him.

The bone-crunching sound of footsteps. Terror pulsed through his weakened body.

*Oh God! No!*

*Come on, Matt! Keep going!* he coaxed himself.

He began running blindly. His legs became numb as he picked up speed.

The footsteps followed him, getting closer and closer as his follower gained on him. Matt heard that same, unearthly growling just feet behind him. He didn't dare turn around. He couldn't do anything but run.

Without warning, Matt felt himself falling deep into the cold, wet earth. He landed with a painful thud on what felt like jagged rocks. Freezing water soaked through his ripped clothing, further numbing his pain-stricken, exhausted body.

Matt screamed as he tried to claw his way out, still unable to figure out where he was. It was so dark and black. He heard a noise from above. He looked up and screamed out in horror. His body hurt too much to move. The footsteps crunched above him, circling him.

The white face peered down into the ditch. Something shiny gleamed in the hand of Michael Myers as it caught the moonlight.

*This can't be happening!*

# CHAPTER

## 1

### *Haddonfield High*

Lori Parker glanced up at the wall clock, watching the seconds slowly ticking by as the voice of her history teacher, Mrs. Grubbs, droned on about the first American settlers. Lori swept her long blond hair over the back of her pale pink sweater.

Sally Wilson passed a note to Lori, who sat at the desk directly behind her. Carefully, Lori opened the folded piece of paper in her lap and noticed that the note was a bit damp. She let out a little giggle as she read,

"I'm sooooo bored. I just noticed that I was drooling on this very piece of paper."

Lori turned around and whispered, "You are so gross!"

Mrs. Grubbs gave the girls a warning look, then turned her attention to the whole class. "Okay, seniors," she said. "As I told you before, this class is a tough course in American History. I want to make sure that you're prepared for the *real* world next year. Get out your notebooks and write down the following practical assignment."

The whole class groaned.

Waving her arms to quiet the class, Mrs. Grubbs continued, "This assignment, I'm hoping, will be fun. You're going to pair up in teams and research a historical event. The subject is your choice. Your reports will be due this Friday and must be at least five pages long. So, be creative and have fun."

More groans and sighs came from the class as Mrs. Grubbs answered scattered questions about the assignment.

Lori turned around to face Sally. "Want to be a team with me?"

Sally smirked. "Of course, dummy! We've only been best g-friends for five years and this happens to be our only class together this semester." She tore a sheet of paper from her notebook and pushed it to Lori. She joked, "But you'll need to sign here and here and here to make this partnership official."

Lori felt a slight blush spread across her freckled cheeks. True, Sally was her best friend, but sometimes her sarcasm was a little annoying.

The two friends were a contrast, Lori with her girl-next-door looks and almost shy personality, and Sally, the darkhaired tigress with flawless skin and a more than occasional flash of mischief in her bright green eyes.

A loud sigh filled the classroom. The girls whirled around to see Marsha Miller, the snobby and rich heir to Haddonfield's biggest company, Miller Realty. Marsha stood up at her desk as she smoothed her designer dress, which she wore with her poutiest expression. She ran her fingers through her sleekly styled hair, whining, "But, Mrs. Grubbs, certainly you must know about my big Halloween party this weekend. How can I possibly be expected to complete this history assignment while planning the biggest social event in town?"

The girls giggled as Mrs. Grubbs rolled her eyes. "I'm sure you'll find a way, Marsha," she said.

Marsha stamped her foot as she slumped into her seat. She shot her meanest look at Sally, who was smirking at her little temper tantrum. Marsha particularly disliked the fiery beauty ever since she'd started dating Matt Hudson, the biggest hunk at Haddonfield High.

Everyone knew that Marsha and Matt had been an item last summer before their bitter breakup. Even Sally had to admit that Marsha was quite attractive; in fact all the guys drooled over her, after the two years of working out with her personal trainer, and the nose job paid for with Daddy's money. But she had a mean streak that had made Matt call it quits before school started. It was common knowledge that Marsha was insanely jealous of Sally and would stop at nothing to get Matt back.

Lori whispered, "If looks could kill."

Sally shrugged her shoulders, turning away from her seething rival. She turned up the volume of her voice so that Marsha and everyone else in the room could hear. "Well, money can only buy so much in this world, like nose jobs, liposuction and shallow friends."

The comment hit Marsha like a slap in the face. She slammed her books on her desk furiously.

Lori stared wide-eyed at Sally for a moment before bursting into a fit of laughter. "Did you see the look on her face!" she whispered. "That serves her right. She's been nothing but mean since you and Matt started dating."

Sally snuggled into the varsity letter jacket that Matt had given her last month. "Well, can you blame her? After all, I do have *exclusive* rights to the hottest piece of property in Haddonfield."

Lori smiled and began scribbling in her notebook.

"What are you doing now?" Sally asked, watching her friend, "writing the Great American Novel?"

"Hang on," Lori told her, trying to concentrate on her train of thought. "I'm just writing down some ideas. Mrs. Grubbs said that the subject of the assignment is our choice. Right?"

Sally looked dumbfoundedly at her A-student friend. "Yeah. So?"

"So, I've got a great idea that will land us both two A pluses." Lori lowered her voice to a whisper so her classmates wouldn't overhear her great plan. "We'll write about the first settlers right here, in Haddonfield, back in the 1800s"

Sally's glossy pink mouth fell open. "What? And just how exactly are we supposed to find out about them? Dig up a few graves? Listen, let's do something easy like the Civil War or George Washington chopping down the lemon tree. We've only got until Friday."

Lori laughed. "It was a cherry tree, Sally." She winked. "Trust me, girlfriend. It'll be a piece of cake. We will have to do a little digging, but it won't be at the graveyard."

Sally gave her a confused look. "What are you talking about?"

Lori smiled. "We'll dig through the old files at City Hall. They have tons of fascinating old newspaper clippings and property records."

Sally protested. "City Hall? That sounds so boring and dusty and... lame!" She gave her shoulder-length hair a little toss. "But, you're the genius when it comes to school and I'm the genius when it comes to cool!"

Lori looked down at her brown loafers, feeling a little awkward. She *was* one of the smartest students at Haddonfield High, but

certainly not one of the most knowledgeable about guys or clothes. Sometimes she felt like a third wheel around Sally and Matt.

Sally touched her arm, "Hey, Lor. I didn't mean anything by that. Are we still best buddies?" she asked softly.

Lori smiled, as she always did when Sally called her Lor. "Yeah, Sal. Everything's cool."

The class bell rang and everyone scrambled, gathering their books and backpacks as they made a mad dash for the door. Sixth period was over and school was officially out on this blustery October Monday.

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Students poured out of the front doors of Haddonfield High and sounds of excited chatter filled the air. Halloween was just around the corner and everyone was caught up in the spirit.

Lori waited patiently as Sally struggled to remember her locker combination... again.

Lori was sure that Sally would lose her head if it wasn't attached. Her best friend was the most scattered, unorganized person she knew.

The halls were almost deserted by the time she opened the metal compartment, which was crammed full of books and papers. Matt's photo was Scotch-taped to the inside of the door. Sally gave the picture a little kiss and cooed, "Hi, cutie pie."

Lori picked up her heavy backpack. "Are you kickin' it with Matt after school?"

When Sally was done, they walked down the corridor toward the main exit.

Sally winked. "Matt's got football practice until five, so we'll probably hook up later." A grin spread across her face. "Why? What are you doing?"

"I don't know. You want to go to City Hall and get started on the assignment?" Lori asked.

Sally hesitated for a moment.

The last thing on her mind was the history assignment.

Lori waved her hand before her dreamy-eyed friend. "Earth to Sally. Hello. Do you want to go or what?"

Sally flashed Lori her best-friend smile, feeling that she owed it to her buddy, whom she'd been neglecting a little lately. "Sure. Why not? I'll call Matt and have him pick us up later," she said.

The two girls walked down the main hall and through the massive glass doors that overlooked the neatly manicured courtyard of Haddonfield High. A few students strayed across the lawn as the chilly wind blew orange and yellow leaves from the towering oak trees through the air.

Lori, lost in her thoughts, walked a few steps behind Sally as they crossed through the student parking lot toward Main Street.

Something was different, she thought.

Was it the distance growing between them since Matt came along, or was it the strange, spooky feeling that the dark, cloudy sky invited? she wondered.

The shops on Main Street were all decorated for the Halloween season. Jack-o'-lanterns sat on almost every windowsill. Other shops had cardboard cutouts of ghosts, black cats and witches hanging in the windows.

Sally stopped to gaze at the display in the flower shop, ogling the bouquets of red roses. "Aren't they beautiful? Matt gave me a red rose last weekend."

Lori forced herself to smile when she really felt like screaming. On one hand, she was glad that Sally was so happy and had a great guy like Matt, but still, she wanted someone of her own. Lori had been feeling a little jealous of their romance lately. If she heard one more juicy, detailed story about Sally's love life, she was going to explode.

The deafening roar of a car engine revving took the girls by surprise. They turned to face the street, where they saw none other than Marsha Miller in her new, black convertible with three of her friends. Marsha's friends laughed sadistically at the scare they'd given the girls.

Lori pointed. "Uh oh. It's Marsha and the snob squad."

Just then a tiny water droplet hit Lori on the nose.



Marsha, nestled in her leather bucket seat looked up into the cloud-covered sky. She smiled wickedly, as though she'd planned the rainfall. A deafening clap of thunder bellowed across the sky and more drops began to fall.

In a display of arrogance, Marsha pushed a button that caused her convertible top to come up, shielding her from the rain. She opened her automatic window just enough to comment sarcastically, "I just love rainy days. Don't you, Sally?" Her sarcasm turned to hatred. "And don't think you're going to get away with that little stunt you pulled in history class today. I'll get my revenge. Mark my words."

To protect herself from the downpour, Sally pulled Matt's jacket over her head, locked in a staring contest with Marsha.

Sally spat out, "Get a life. Better yet, go *buy* a life! Everyone knows that Matt dumped you and you're just jealous of me. Stop making a fool out of yourself."

Marsha's face turned crimson red. "Oh! Is that what he told you? That *he* dumped *me*? Reality check! Hello! I don't think so."

Sally took a step toward the fiercely idling sports car. "Look, Marsha, I don't want to be your enemy. I think we've both had enough of each other and I'm willing to call a truce."

Marsha laughed. "A truce? *Me* call a truce with someone who's wearing last season's clothes? Get real! I hate you, Sally. In fact, I'm going to dedicate the rest of the semester to making your life a living hell."

Sally laughed sarcastically. "No thanks, Marsha, you're really not my type."

Marsha's engine revved with fury. "Be afraid! Be very afraid!" Her black car tore off down Main Street.

# CHAPTER

## 2

The girls jogged down Main Street toward City Hall.

Lori commented nervously, "What a psycho! She's almost scary. You'd better watch out for her, Sally."

Sally puffed. "I'm not worried. She's all bark and no bite. You know, like bow wow wow!"

Lori smiled, hiding the looming danger she sensed. "Yeah. I guess you're right. Do you think this means that Marsha will be excluding us from the guest list for her big Halloween party?"

Sally rolled her eyes, "Are you serious?"

The girls stopped before City Hall, the oldest building in Haddonfield, taking a few breaths before climbing up the massive staircase to the entrance.

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An old woman sat behind the oak desk in the spacious lobby. She smoothed her neatly braided white hair and gave the girls a bright smile. "Welcome to Haddonfield City Hall. What brings you two lovely girls here on this dreary afternoon?"

Lori wiped a bit of dust from the desk. "We came here to do some research for a history assignment on the first settlers of Haddonfield. Can we take a look at the old newspaper archives?" she asked.

The old woman's smile faded as she eyed the girls suspiciously for a moment. "Well, I suppose so. I guess you're too young to be tabloid reporters. You know, we get a lot of news reporters snooping around here this time of year, wanting to know about the Haddonfield murders. I wish people would just forget about this town and leave us alone. You know, just last week a reporter from the *National Inquisitor* was here and—"

Sally glanced at her watch and butted in as politely as possible, "Ma'am? If you could just show us where the archives are?"

The old woman straightened her gray wool blazer and pulled out a large ring of keys. "Follow me, girls."

The girls shivered as they entered the dimly lit basement. Hundreds of steel file cabinets stretched from one end of the room to the other, casting eerie shapes along the brick walls.

The old woman smiled proudly. "This is it. I call it the labyrinth. I've been keeping these files for thirty years. The newspapers are filed by date in those cabinets to the right. I hope you girls have thick blood. It's colder than a morgue down here since the heater broke. We just haven't had the funding to get it repaired. But Mayor Jamison promised he'd get it taken care of soon."

Before Lori could ask the woman which row of filing cabinets to start with, she had disappeared up the stairs.

Lori shrugged and looked at Sally. "I guess we're on our own. Come on."

The girls walked through the maze of filing cabinets, working their way toward the right-hand wall.

Sally sneezed. "It's so dusty and cold down here. I wish I was with Matt right now drinking a cup of hot chocolate."

Lori stopped and looked at her friend, feeling annoyed. "Can you stop thinking about Matt for five minutes? We have work to do."

Sally dully answered, "Okay. So where do we start?" Something caught her eye. "Hey, look at this!" Sally exclaimed. She bent down and picked up a heavy padlock from the floor next to a drawer that had been left slightly open. "I wonder what's in here."

Lori nervously glanced around the eerie, spacious room and whispered, "Sally! Put that back where you found it before someone sees you!"

Mischief flashed in Sally's eyes as she reached for the first file in the open drawer. She rifled through its crumbling contents.

Lori hissed, "Sally! I'm warning you!"

Sally's mouth fell open, "Oh my gosh! You're not going to believe what's in here! Talk about Haddonfield history!"

Lori stepped closer, her curiosity aroused. "What? Will you hurry up and tell me what's so interesting before the clerk throws us out of here?"

Sally gasped, "Look at this. It's full of newspaper clippings and police reports from the seventies about the Halloween murders."

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"November 1, 1978. HALLOWEEN MASSACRE IN HADDONFIELD. Residents of Haddonfield are mourning the loss of four local teenagers who were brutally murdered last night by convicted killer Michael Myers. Police report that Myers escaped from the Smith Grove Mental Hospital where he had been undergoing psychiatric treatment after murdering his sister, Judith Myers, fifteen years ago on Halloween night. The murder weapon, a large kitchen butcher knife, was found at the scene of the crime on Oak Street. Myers was last seen wearing a rubber Halloween mask and black jumpsuit. He escaped capture and is still at large. Police are asking for any information regarding the whereabouts of Myers and are considering him armed and very dangerous"

Sally's eyes were glued to the pages before her. She swallowed, hardly believing the words that came from her mouth. "Listen to this one! This police report says that he was shot by police six times and thrown out a window before he escaped!"

Lori sighed, "Well, he couldn't have survived something like that. I'm sure he died and they just never found the body."

Sally picked out another news clipping, "Here's one from just ten years ago!" She held out the police sketch of Michael Myers, his face covered by a hideous white mask. "TWELVE MASSACRED IN HADDONFIELD. Last night twelve area teenagers were brutally massacred in Haddonfield by convicted killer Michael Myers. Myers —"

The lights in the basement flickered off then on. Lori sucked in her breath. "Sally! What was that?"

*Michael Myers.*

Lori flinched as the name flashed through her mind. She stared at the overhead lights as a sinking feeling swept over her. "Is this stuff true? I mean... how could something like this have happened? Here! In Haddonfield?"

Sally shrugged. "I don't know if it's all true, but people say so. It all happened a long time ago." She shivered. "They say he comes back

on Halloween—to get revenge."

A shadowy figure watched the girls from the top of the stairs and silently moved closer to them.

Lori chewed on her thumbnail and whispered, "Sally! Stop reading this stuff. It's freaking me out. What if it did happen and—"

A large hand fell down upon Sally's shoulder.

"Aaaugh!"

Sally screamed and Lori jumped back, her heart pounding with terror.

The girls spun around to find Mayor Jamison towering above them, a deep scowl upon his face.

Sally dropped the file, scattering papers all over the floor. "Mayor Jamison! You scared us to death!" she exclaimed. She bent over and began picking up the mess.

Lori felt the blood rush to her face. "I'm—We're so sorry. We were just here to research a project school for, I mean for school... and I... I'm Lori Parker and this is Sally Wilson," she stammered.

Mayor Jamison picked up the padlock from the floor, "Do you girls, Lori and Sally, always pick locks?"

Sally handed him the disheveled file with shaking hands. "We're really sorry. We just found it open like this and, well, started reading. We won't tell anyone about this. We promise. And we'll never bother you again." She grabbed Lori's arm. "Come on, Lori. Let's go."

The mayor took a step forward, his huge body blocking their way. "Not so fast. You girls have trespassed and read confidential city files. This is pretty serious," he informed them.

Lori protested, hoping her voice didn't sound too shaky, "We didn't exactly trespass, sir. The clerk upstairs let us down here and we found it open like Sally told you. We shouldn't have read the files, you're right. We really didn't mean any harm," she explained.

The mayor suddenly seemed to think of something and his expression softened a little. He pointed a finger at Lori. "You're not John Parker's daughter, are you?"

Lori swallowed hard. "Yes. I am. My father was a volunteer on your last campaign."

"John Parker. A fine man," the mayor stated. He looked at the trembling teens, and seemed to decide no real harm had been done here. "Okay, calm down. I'm going to let this incident slide. But you must promise not to discuss what you've read with anyone. Do you understand me?"

Sally laughed nervously. "Thanks, Mayor. I guess we'll be going then. Oh yeah, and when I'm old enough to vote, I'll remember this."

Mayor Jamison laughed. "Well, that's one way to win an election!"

He glanced at the file in his hand and his smile faded. "Say. What are you girls doing for Halloween?"

Lori gave him a puzzled look, wondering why on earth he would be asking them such a question. "Us? Well, we're not sure yet. Why?" she asked.

Sally envisioned herself dressed in a sequined black gown and Matt in a tuxedo, eating little crab cakes from a silver platter at a fancy city Halloween party. She beamed. "We're not doing anything... special."

Mayor Jamison glanced around the giant basement. "How would you girls like to be in charge of a very special city project?"

Sally cocked her head. "City project? What do you mean?"

Lori pictured the two of them wearing orange city uniforms, picking up trash on Halloween night as punishment for what they'd done. She guessed they deserved it. She asked, "Do you mean, like, making up the damage for what we've done?"

The mayor laughed. "Well, not exactly. I was thinking about having Haddonfield's largest Halloween party, right here at City Hall. I need a couple of bright, energetic individuals to be in charge of it. We'll transform this basement into a giant haunted house, you know, to keep the local teenagers safe and off the streets on Halloween."

Sally watched the mayor rubbing the old file nervously in his hand. "*Safe from what?*" she asked.

The mayor cleared his throat. He explained, "You know, all the malls have trick-or-treating at the stores these days because there are sick, sick people out there who put razor blades in apples and poison candy. Since we don't have a major mall out here, I thought that City Hall would be the perfect place. So, are you girls in?"

Sally thought about it for a moment. "I don't know," she said reluctantly. "It sounds like a lot of work to put it together on such short notice. How come you're planning it so late?"

The mayor's expression became serious. "I just came up with the idea this morning. Something... came up," he said, his thoughts wandering. He tapped the filing cabinet. "Besides, you girls *do* owe me a favor. I'll even set aside a special fund for decorations and refreshments."

Lori's eyes flashed as she looked at Sally. She coaxed, "Come on. It sounds like fun. Besides, we don't have anything else to do. It's not like we're going to Marsha's party."

The words struck a nerve in Sally. She half smiled. "Okay. We'll do it."

The mayor heartily shook their hands. "Great. I'm so happy to have you two helping out. This really means a lot to me. I've got to go now. Please stop by my office tomorrow and we'll discuss the plans."

# CHAPTER

## 3

Lori leaned against the stone wall in front of City Hall in the windy, cold weather. The rain poured down in sheets on the street below. She could see Sally inside the lobby, on the pay phone with Matt. The old woman waited patiently for her to end the phone call and then escorted her out. She locked the towering glass doors behind them.

Sally snuggled into her jacket as the icy wind blew through her dark hair. "Matt said he'll be here to pick us up in ten minutes," she said.

Lori shivered, "The Scream Factory."

"What are you talking about?" Sally asked.

Lori smiled, explaining, "The haunted house. Let's call it The Scream Factory. We can throw sheets over all those file cabinets and turn it into a maze of terror! Then we'll make up flyers and pass them out at school. Oh, this is going to be a blast!"

Sally shrugged. "I don't know. I'm having second thoughts." She explained, "Something is wrong. Did you see the way the mayor kept looking at that file? I just have a bad vibe about all this. He's not telling us something."

Lori brushed a lock of wind-tangled hair from her face. "He's a politician. I'm sure there's a lot of things he isn't telling us. Besides, we agreed to do this and he's counting on us. So let's make the best of it. It might even be fun."

Sally couldn't stop thinking of the horrible stories she'd read about Michael Myers. Why hadn't they found his body? What if it was all true?

*What if?*

Sally *knew* it was true, but she didn't want to believe.

She looked seriously at Lori, trying to talk her out of it. "I don't understand why he'd suddenly decide to plan such a huge party just a few days before Halloween. And the other weird thing about it is that the city doesn't even have the funding to get the heating repaired, but



the mayor is willing to shell out the money for a party? I just don't get it."

Lori put her arm around Sally. "Hey. We'll have so many lit-up jack-o'-lanterns in that building we won't need any heating. Besides, *this* is the perfect way to get back at Marsha Miller! The whole school will come to our party instead of hers. We'll invite everybody!"

Sally crinkled her nose. "Ooooh. I like the sound of that. I can just see her now, pouting all by herself at her little party. You've talked me into it."

Matt Hudson pulled up in front of City Hall in his red Jeep, loud rock music blaring through the canvas top. He hopped out and bounded up the stairs with ease to where the girls were talking.

He held out his muscular arms to Sally. "Hey, sweetie. I'm here. Don't I get a kiss?"

Lori watched as Sally brushed his deep brown hair off his perfectly chiseled face. Sally was really lucky, she thought. She could understand why Marsha was so obsessed with Matt. When he smiled at Sally, showing those perfect white teeth, it was as if she were the only girl on the planet.

Sally pouted. "What took you so long, Matt? Your little snuggle bunny was freezing out here."

Matt growled, "Ooooh. I love it when you talk bunnies to me!"

Matt looked at Lori as if he hadn't seen her there before, "Oh. Hi, Lori."

Lori smiled politely. "Hi, Matt. Are you guys ready to go?"

Matt tickled Sally, who was giggling hysterically as they piled into the Jeep.

Matt turned down the volume of his radio and asked, "So, what were the two hottest babes in Haddonfield doing at City Hall anyway?"

Sally smiled. "You are looking at the hostesses of Haddonfield's wildest Halloween party ever!"

Matt reached beneath his seat and pulled out a small black envelope. "Marsha's party? Here's my invitation. Well, I'm glad you two finally made peace. So what are you going to be doing for her?"

"*Doing for her!*" Sally repeated. She grabbed the invitation. "Give me that! Matt! How could you even consider going to that witch's party?" Sally tore open the envelope and read aloud in a sickening sweet voice, "Matt, hope you can make it to my party for the time of your life."

Matt stared dumbly at Sally. "She just gave it to me after football practice today. I thought you just said that you guys made up. What's the deal?"

Sally threw down the invitation, "No! As a matter of fact, we *didn't* make up. I can't believe her! She almost ran us over with her car after school and then she follows you to football practice to deliver this *disgusting* little invitation. Will she stop at nothing?"

Matt smirked and put his hand on Sally's knee. "You're kind of cute when you're jealous," he teased.

Sally sighed, feeling foolish for getting so upset. "I'm not jealous. And I'm *not* going to Marsha's party. Lori and I are having our own Halloween bash and *you* are coming with *me*."

Lori spoke up, trying to ease the tension. "Mayor Jamison asked us to throw a giant party at City Hall. We're going to transform the basement into a haunted house and we're inviting the whole school and everyone else in Haddonfield. We're calling it The Scream Factory."

Matt laughed. "A party with the mayor? Are you serious? The place will be crawling with little kids and old fogies that reek of mothballs! How are we supposed to have any fun at a place like that?"

Sally twisted Matt's class ring, which she wore on her thumb. Her feelings were obviously hurt. "It's not going to be like that. We're going to make it the coolest party this town has ever seen. So unless you have other plans, I'll need your help with this," she said.

Matt looked at his beautiful girlfriend. On one hand, he was feeling guilty for flaunting his invitation in front of her. But on the other hand, he hated the thought of missing one of Marsha's wild parties with catered food and plenty of spiked fruit punch.

He gave her leg a little squeeze. "Of course I'll help you, Sally. I was just joking about the old fogies and stuff."

Lori peered out her window at the wet street. She strained to make out a dark figure pushing a motorcycle on the other side of the road. "Hey, Matt. Stop. That was Jake Kovac back there pushing his bike. Let's go see if he needs any help."

Matt snorted, "Help? Of course he needs help!" Matt pointed. "Look at that guy in his faded black denim jeans and leather jacket. The rebel without a clue! The lone stranger!"

Sally looked back at Jake, pushing his old motorcycle in the rain. "Matt. Just because someone isn't a jock doesn't mean that they're weird," she said defensively. "Let's go help him."

Matt saw Lori's hopeful expression in his rearview mirror and realized how silly and immature he was acting. He groaned as he made a U-turn.

Lori ignored Matt's stupid jokes. Sometimes he was so insensitive, such a *jock*. "He's an artist. And a good one," she said in Jake's defense.

Sally turned around to look at Lori "Oh yeah? Since when do you know so much about Jake Kovac?"

Lori anxiously waited as Matt turned the Jeep around.

Jake always sat in front of Lori in her physical science class. He never said much. A few times she'd seen him watching her, but he'd always turned around before she could give him a smile. She often stared at his honey-blond hair and had always thought he was very attractive and... a little dangerous.

Lori answered, "I've seen him drawing in science class in his notebook."

Matt pulled over in the gravel a few feet away from Jake. "Okay, Lori. Go ask James Dean if he needs a ride," he said.

A flush spread across Lori's cheeks as she got out of the Jeep. She yelled, "Hey, Jake! Do you need some help?"

Jake stopped pushing the bike and looked up to see Lori Parker. She stood there under the dark sky like some kind of angel, with that pink angora sweater stretching across her chest.

He cleared his throat, shocked to see her. "Yeah. I could use a ride."

Lori smiled brightly. "Great. Come on."

Jake was a little embarrassed about the broken bike as he pushed the kickstand into the gravel. "I'll come pick up my bike tomorrow when the rain lets up," he mumbled.

Lori stepped closer, really noticing his mysterious eyes for the first time. "You've got a little smudge on your cheek." She gingerly wiped his face with her fingertip.

Jake stared at her, mesmerized by her touch. "Uh. Thanks. Must be oil from the bike." He gave her a shy smile and followed her to the Jeep.

*Why are they helping me?* he thought.

Electrical impulses rushed through his entire body as he watched her walk. Some days it almost drove him mad knowing that this gorgeous creature was sitting not more than two feet behind him and he couldn't even bring himself to speak or look at her. Here she was *in the flesh*, offering him a ride, touching his face, staring at him with those blue eyes.

*Don't blow it Jake*, he told himself.

Matt started the engine as Jake and Lori piled in. "Hey, man. Having a bad day?"

Jake awkwardly scrunched into the backseat with his long legs nearly touching his chin. "No, well, yeah. Hey, thanks for the ride. I live on Ripley Road, about a mile up from the old Myers place."

*The Myers place!*

The horrible newspaper articles flashed through Sally's mind. She turned to Jake. "Really? You actually live up there? Is all that stuff true, about Michael Myers?"

Lori listened intently as Jake spoke in his soft, deep voice. "Yeah," he said. "They say it's all true. But things have been quiet around there for years. They say the Myers house is haunted, but I don't buy it. I pass it every day and never see any action over there except for the weeds growing. The place has been deserted for over thirty years, since he killed his sister on Halloween night."

Matt laughed. "Yeah, right. I can't believe you guys. I don't even think that Michael Myers existed. It's all just a bunch of stupid rumors."

Lori noticed that Jake's long leg was touching hers. "Matt, you're such an ignoramus! We just read all the old newspaper articles today at City Hall. I seriously doubt that all of those stories were just made up. I agree with Jake."

Jake winked at Lori. He tapped Matt on the shoulder and challenged, "Why don't we stop by the old Myers place on the way to my house? I'll show you the bloodstains on the wall."

Sally squealed, "No way! That is too creepy! Besides, it's getting dark."

Matt downshifted as they turned the corner onto Ripley Road. "You're on, Jake. I'm not scared of that old dump."

# CHAPTER

## 4

The old Myers place looks harmless enough... sort of, Lori thought as they pulled up in front.

A faded Miller Realty sign hung in what used to be the front yard, now only a desolate, lifeless scrap of land. Most of the windows had been boarded up and strips of white paint peeled from the wood like skin shedding off a snake.

The moonlight cast an eerie yellow light on the two-story house as Lori stared in awe. The house had appeared almost normal from a distance, but as she looked closer, she felt repulsed by its presence as if it were a giant, fat, black insect. She pointed at the FOR SALE sign, which creaked on its hinges. "Can you imagine living here?"

*What if the stories were true?*

*What if they never recovered his body?*

Jake stroked his blond hair away from his face. "It's been for sale ever since I've lived up here. I've seen two or three families move out just as fast as they moved in. No one can stand it in there. The real estate company comes by every year to clean it up a little, but the local kids always vandalize it and break the windows faster than they can be replaced." Jake paused, lowering his voice for effect. "They say it's the entrance to hell."

A splintered wooden shutter banged in the wind in the tiny attic of the house, making the girls jump unexpectedly.

Jake pointed. "This is where it all started. That's the room he killed her in on Halloween night."

*Killed!*

Sally shivered as she glanced at the window. "Okay. We've seen it now. Let's come back in the daylight. I don't like this place."

Matt's adrenaline was pumping furiously as he looked at the creepy old house. Not wanting to look like a wimp in front of his girlfriend, he opened the door of his Jeep and stepped out. "Come on, Jake. Give me the grand tour."

Sally pleaded, "Matt. I really don't think you should go in there."

Matt laughed nervously. "Yeah! I'll bet Michael Myers is in there waiting for me! You girls just stay out here. We'll be back in a few minutes. I'm going to prove to you guys once and for all that there's nothing here to be afraid of."

Sally and Lori huddled close to the Jeep as they watched Matt and Jake disappear around the back of the house.

Lori whispered to Sally, "Well. What do you think about Jake? He's pretty cute, isn't he?"

Sally chewed her nails as she stared into the darkness, feeling a little worried about Matt. "I never really noticed him before, but he seems... nice if you like the... dark, mysterious type."

"I like it all right," Lori said breathily. "But what do you mean by 'dark'? His hair is almost as blond as mine."

Sally imitated Jake's deep voice. "Follow me and I'll show you the bloodstains on the wall."

Lori giggled. "He's just trying to be friendly and show us a good time. Do you think he likes me?"

"Are you kidding? Did you see the way he was looking at you with those intense eyes?" Sally asked.

"He was? Really?" Lori beamed, her heart feeling light. Thoughts of Jake's gorgeous face swept freshly through her mind.

\*\*\*

Matt followed Jake around the side of the yard to the rotted back porch steps, his heart pounding with excitement and fear.

*What was really inside this house?* he wondered.

The window on the back door was boarded up.

Jake pulled and twisted the doorknob. "Damn. Somebody must have locked it."

Matt teased, "Do you come here often?"

"I don't hang out here or anything if that's what you mean," Jake answered, feeling the awkward tension between him and Matt. They came from totally different worlds: Matt was Haddonfield's most popular jock, and Jake, well, he was just... different.

*What am I doing here?* he thought.

He smiled to himself, remembering that Lori was waiting for them. He wondered if he had even the slightest chance with her.

Matt peered through the boards over the dusty kitchen window, feeling a wave of relief now that they didn't actually have to go inside.

Matt's body suddenly stiffened and he jerked away from the window. "Let's go, Jake. Now!"

"What? What did you see in there?" Jake asked, scrambling to peer inside the window.

Matt's face had gone pale. He was walking backward, away from the house.

Jake rubbed some dust away from the window with his sleeve to get a clear look inside. He gasped, "What the—"

The limp body of a black dog lay in a sickening pool of congealed blood on the kitchen floor. A pair of dead, glassy eyes stared back at Jake, making his skin crawl. Around the carcass were scattered bits of flesh and blood-caked fur, which appeared to have been ripped from the gaping gash in the animal's neck. Across the faded, peeling kitchen wallpaper stretched bloody, hand-scrawled letters, which could be read clearly, even in the darkness, spelling out "REVENGE."

Jake squeezed his eyes shut and turned to Matt. "Matt! Did you see what was written in there!"

Matt was still walking backward in shock. Pure evil seemed to pour through the very walls.

"Look out!" Jake screamed.

Matt tumbled backward down the rotting steps and landed with a hard thud on the muddy ground below.

Jake rushed to his side. "Matt! Are you okay? Talk to me, man!"

Matt lifted his head from the ground, still startled by the fall. "What happened?"

"Come on. Let's get out of here," Jake said. Matt sat there in a daze, trying to brush the mud off his clothes, which only made the soil sink deeper into the fabric of his jeans. He stared at Jake for a moment, his eyes becoming cold with anger. "That was a really sick prank! Wait until I tell the guys about this at school. Man! You are crazy!"



"What are you talking about? I had nothing to do with this!" Jake yelled. "We've got to report this. Let's call the police."

They stared at each other for a moment. Jake broke the uncomfortable silence. "What! You think I did this? Yeah. Right! My bike just happened to break down and you just happened to drive by and offer me a ride and then I talked you into coming up here to show you this! You're wrong, Matt. Dead wrong! I'm out of here!"

Matt rubbed his head, feeling like he was going to be sick as he thought it over. Was Jake capable of something like this? The coincidence was nearly impossible for him to have planned it.

Matt shook his head, feeling confused. "Wait a minute. Stop," he said. Jake kept walking. Matt continued. "Hey! I'm sorry... I guess you couldn't have planned it. It's just that I don't really know you and everyone at school says... you know... well, never mind."

Jake whirled around to face Matt. "What do they say? That I'm crazy? That I never talk to anyone? That I'm a loner?" His voice sounded hurt. "Let me ask you a question. Do you always listen to what other people say? Do you always follow the crowd?"

Matt didn't like being wrong, but he was truly sorry for blaming such an awful thing on Jake.

*But if Jake didn't do it, who did?*

The thought made his blood run cold. Matt answered, "No, as a matter of fact, I don't always follow the crowd and I don't always believe everything they say."

Matt's serious expression melted as he held out his hand. "Help me up already," he said.

Jake's anger faded as he pulled Matt up to his feet. "Let's get out of here. We can call the police from my house."

"No," Matt said. "It was probably just some sick college prank. Besides, I don't want to spend the next forty-eight hours being interrogated under bright lights." He placed a hand on Jake's shoulder. "Don't say anything to the girls about this. I don't want to scare them."

Jake protested, "What about the writing and the dead dog? That wasn't here last time I came up here. What if—"

*What if Michael Myers...*

Matt placed a finger on his lips. "Forget about it. Help me brush some of this dirt off my clothes before we go back to the car." Matt saw Jake looking at the house. He was nervous—no, frightened.

Matt stared harder at Jake.

He looked almost normal, except for the black leather and long hair, Matt thought.

He wondered what Jake would look like dressed in a polo shirt and a pair of khakis. He smiled. "Maybe they were wrong about you, the kids at school. You're all right, Jake."

\*\*\*

The moonlight shone down upon the clearing in the woods behind the old house. Voices... teenage voices were laughing and talking... and *laughing*.

He'd heard them. The dark figure silently moved among the trees at the edge of the clearing to get a closer look. Through the darkness, he could see the girls.

*Laughing.*

\*\*\*

Lori and Sally leaned against the Jeep.

Sally sighed. "What's taking them so long? Maybe we should go find them. It's getting cold out here."

Lori was warm in her pink sweater. "Why don't you wait in the car and I'll go get them?"

Sally agreed. "Okay." After all, she didn't want to go near that awful house.

Lori carefully made her way through the weeds and vines that covered the front lawn of the house, toward the front doorway. The old house creaked in the wind, sending chills down her spine. "Matt? Jake? Are you guys in there?" she called.

There were no sounds from inside the house.

*Maybe I should go around back,* she thought nervously.

She took a deep breath and peered into the tiny window on the front door. "Hello? Can you hear me?" On her tiptoes, she strained to

see into the dark house. A faint rotting smell suddenly invaded her nostrils. Lori felt nauseous as her eyes adjusted to the darkness. Her eyes searched the tattered wallpaper inside and made out what appeared to be a—

*Craaaaaaak!*

"Aaaaaaah!"

She screamed as a beam in the rotting wooden porch below her feet suddenly crumbled, causing her to lose her balance and sink down several feet.

\*\*\*

Jake grabbed Matt by the arm. "Come on! I heard one of the girls screaming!"

Matt and Jake found Lori sobbing on the front porch as she struggled to free her leg from the jagged boards. "There's something in there!" she cried. "Help me get out of here!"

*Help me!*

Jake pulled Lori's foot from the hole in the porch. "Shhhhh. You're okay," he told her tenderly. He gently inspected her ankle. "It's just a scratch."

Fear pumped through Matt's blood as he looked through the dust-caked window.

What had she seen?

He reminded himself that he was one of the strongest guys at school and could take on any grown man in a fistfight. He hoped he didn't look as scared as he felt.

He strained to make out the dark shapes inside the house, his heart thudding heavily.

*There! There it was!*

He suddenly laughed with relief. "It's a jack-o'-lantern!" he cried. "On the table in there! It's just a stupid *pumpkin!*"

Lori snuggled into Jake's surprisingly strong arms as he scooped her up from the porch. "What a night. I'm glad you're here," she breathed.

Jake felt the electricity traveling through his body again as he held her tightly. "I'm glad you're here too. But it's all my fault for bringing you guys up here in the first place. I'm really sorry about all this and..."

Lori turned her head slightly to look back at the house and her lips brushed against Jake's cheek. She lowered her eyes, embarrassed by the contact. "Don't be sorry... Jake."

Jake carried Lori to the Jeep, following Matt's brisk pace. Sally stared at them as they piled in.

"Look what the cat dragged in!" Sally exclaimed. "Matt! What happened to you? Why are you all covered in mud?"

"He slipped in a puddle of water," Jake quickly explained.

"So how was the tour? Did you guys find anything spooky in there?" Sally asked.

Matt winked at Jake. "Nope. Nothing in there but a lot of dust. Although, Lori had quite an adventure, didn't you?" he said, hoping to steer the conversation elsewhere.

Lori rubbed her ankle. "Oh my gosh, Sally. I was so scared. I saw something in there and I slipped and fell down through the porch! It was so freaky. But Matt said it was only a jack-o'-lantern and then Jake came and saved me. That's all."

Sally stared at her chattering friend, noticing a faint pink lipstick print on Jake's cheek. "Wow. Sounds like I missed *all* the excitement," she said.

Lori laughed. "Yeah, it was pretty wild! You should have been there."

"Thanks, but no thanks. I'm glad we're leaving that creep pit," Sally said.

What was going on with Lori and Jake? she wondered. She hadn't seen Lori this excited in a long time.

Lori breathed in the delicious smell of Jake's leather jacket, still damp from the rain. "Hey, Jake. The three of us are having a big Halloween haunted house at City Hall this Friday. Do you want to help us this week with the decorations?" she asked.

Matt laughed. "Watch out for these two girls, Jake. They'll work you to the bone if you're not careful!" He glanced sideways at him.

"But we really could use your help. Lori says you're an artist?"

Jake was enjoying all the attention from his new friends, especially Lori. "Yeah. I'd love to help. I worked for the art department at the Haddonfield Theater for the last three summers and can rig up some great props and special effects if you want. I'm also a musician if you want a little live rock 'n' roll."

Lori was impressed. "Really? Wow. What instrument do you play?" she asked eagerly.

Jake smiled. "Guitar. But I'm really a singer. I've been practicing with my band, Zen, in my garage studio since summer. We're getting pretty good and I'm sure the guys in the band would love the chance to play a live gig, especially on Halloween."

"Oh. This is too perfect! A live band!" Sally said, excitement glittering in her eyes. "Our party is going to be the coolest."

"So who's in your band?" Matt asked with a hint of sarcasm in his voice. "I don't know of any musicians around here except for the geeks in the school band."

Jake answered, "I play with two guys that go to the university and a guy from Bluffwood High. You probably wouldn't know them."

\*\*\*

Matt pulled the Jeep into Jake's driveway. He still wasn't entirely sold on Jake, although he was interesting. A little weird, but interesting. Jake certainly wasn't the beer-drinking, belching jock type Matt was used to hanging out with. In fact, Matt wasn't sure what type Jake was.

Matt casually nodded his head. "Thanks for the ... unusual outing."

Jake gave Lori's hand a little squeeze. "I'll see you tomorrow, Lori. Bye, Sally. Bye, Matt. Thanks for the ride."

# CHAPTER

## 5

Matt swung the Jeep into Sally's driveway. The wind howled through the pine trees in the forest behind her house.

"Do you want to come in for a little while?" Sally asked.

Matt shifted uncomfortably in his seat, the mud on his clothes beginning to dry. "No. I don't want your folks to see me like this. I'll see you tomorrow," he said. He looked at Lori. "Bye, Lori. Are you sure you don't want a ride home?"

Lori smiled. "No, thanks. Sally and I have lots to talk about. Besides, my house is only two blocks away."

"Okay then. I'll see you two tomorrow," he said.

Sally gave him a little kiss good night. "Okay. Call me later, sweetie."

Matt grinned. "I will."

Lori followed Sally into the warm house.

Sally's mom smiled at them from the kitchen table. "There's spaghetti in the big pot if you girls are hungry."

"Thanks Mom. I'm starving," Sally said.

She plopped some spaghetti on two plates for them. "Let's go eat in my room," she said.

Sally cleared some clothes from the floor of her messy room and peeled off Matt's jacket. The girls fell onto Sally's canopy bed, stylishly covered with matching flowered pillows and a down comforter.

"So what's the scoop on Jake Kovac?" Sally asked excitedly. "I would have never in a million years pictured the two of you together!"

Lori blushed. "Well, we're not exactly, together... yet."

"Not together? What about the kiss you gave him and the way he was carrying you around as if you were some kind of princess?"

"Hey! Where'd you get the crazy idea that I kissed him?" Lori laughed.

Sally swallowed a bite of spaghetti. "Princess Lori, lipstick prints never lie. I saw it on his face. So, is he a good kisser?"

Lori picked up a pillow and swung it playfully at her friend. "I didn't *kiss* him, you dork! My lips accidentally touched his cheek. That's all! It's not like he held me passionately in his arms and planted a big one on my lips!"

Sally scrambled to pick up another pillow. "Sure! Did you like it? Do you like him? Tell me the truth or I'll have to whack you with this bag of feathers!"

Lori squealed, ducking. "Of course I like him. I just never told anyone!" She laughed. "Especially a big mouth like you."

Sally swung again, giggling hysterically. "Ooooh. Withholding information from your best friend? This means war!"

Lori jumped off the bed, armed with her pillow. The two girls laughed and shrieked as they took shots at each other. Small feathers floated and whirled through the air.

The phone rang.

Sally caught her breath and searched for the red heart-shaped phone beneath the clothing that was strewn across the floor.

She picked up the receiver. "Hello?... Hello? I can't hear you. Is anyone there?"

Sally giggled, passing the receiver to Lori. She whispered, "Listen to this. I think we've got an obscene caller!"

Lori pressed the phone to her ear and listened to the heavy breathing coming across the line. She handed the phone back to Sally, whispering, "Just hang up. That's how you're supposed to handle calls like this."

Sally spoke, ignoring Lori's advice. "Hey, jerk! What's the matter? Can't you get a date?"

Lori protested, "Sally! Just hang up."

Sally laughed into the phone, "Your breathing is awfully sexy. But I already have a boyfriend. But maybe my friend Lori would be interested."

"Sally!" Lori hissed, grabbing the phone and slamming down the receiver.

Sally giggled, "Well, you *said* you're not together with Jake yet!" Lori looked at her angrily. "Come on, Lor. I was just kidding around."

Lori pouted. "You're not very funny."

The phone rang again.

The two girls jumped, looking at each other, then at the phone.

Sally reached for the phone. This time she was a little annoyed. "This guy doesn't give up," she said. "Hello? Matt? Is this you fooling around? Cut it out."

The breathing through the receiver became heavier.

Sally's face twisted in disgust as the raspy sound became a threatening growl. She hung up the phone, her hands shaking.

Lori searched Sally's pale face for an answer. "What did he say? What happened?"

Sally stared at the phone. "He didn't say anything! He... it just made this *sickening* noise. It wasn't Matt either. Who would do this?"

"It was probably one of Marsha's friends. You know, trying to scare you," Lori commented.

"Maybe you're right. It was just Marsha." Sally muttered to herself.

\*\*\*

The mini mall parking lot was empty except for the flickering neon sign of the convenience store. The shadowed figure stole one last glance at Sally's bedroom window across the street. He'd been watching them frolicking around on the bed, squealing. The bad girls had stopped laughing. Breathing heavily, he lurched away, disappearing into the dark forest behind the building, leaving the silver pay phone cord twisted into a miniature noose.

\*\*\*

Lori picked up a pillow from the floor and tossed it back on Sally's bed. "I'd better get going home now. My mom is probably wondering where I am."

"Do you want to ask my mom for a ride home, you know, after twisting your ankle and all?" Sally offered.



Lori smiled. "No. I'm fine. Besides, some fresh air will do me good. It's been a wild day." Lori wanted to be alone with her delicious thoughts of Jake.

Sally shrugged her shoulders, "Okay, Lori. I'll see you tomorrow morning."

"Bye."

\*\*\*

Lori crossed the street at the convenience store and shivered as she walked down the sidewalk that ran along the edge of the forest. She'd walked home from Sally's house hundreds of times and knew by memory alone where every buckle in the sidewalk was.

She shivered as the icy wind howled through the trees. It felt like it was going to start snowing.

She scanned through the day's events in her mind, over and over again. Especially the part where Jake had held her in his arms. She imagined that he'd kissed her and pictured his soft lips touching hers. She felt as if she were floating along. Tomorrow she would see him again. She could hardly wait.

A branch crackled from the dark woods. Lori stopped suddenly, feeling as if eyes from the woods were watching her. She listened for a moment and heard nothing but the wind. But she still had the weird feeling that she was being watched. Her heart pounded as she thought about the horrible murders that had happened in those woods so long ago. She began walking briskly, anxious to get home. What if it was a stray wolf or—

*Crunch!*

The noise, now even closer than before, made her gasp. It was following her.

*Stalking her.*

She began running. She could still hear the footsteps keeping pace with her, crushing the dense undergrowth beneath the trees in the blackness. Her heart pounded with fear as she quickly glanced over her shoulder.

"Aaaaagh!"

Lori's foot caught on a split in the sidewalk and she suddenly felt herself falling. She landed roughly on the jagged, wet asphalt of the street. Pain shot through her leg as she lifted herself up, her heart feeling as if it were going to explode. She could see her house just up the street now.

She winced from the pain as she stood on her feet, tears streaming down her cheeks. Just a few more yards and she'd be safe at home. The wind blew against her body as she ran toward her house, strands of hair whipping across her face. The footsteps were right next to her now. She could hear the heavy breathing of the thing in the woods as if it were right over her shoulder.

Suddenly a pair of headlights came up the road behind her. She whipped around, waving her arms for help.

"Stop! Help me!" she cried.

The blue sedan pulled to a stop. Lori saw that the driver was her dad.

"Oh! Thank God you're here, Daddy!" She scrambled into the passenger side, breathless with relief.

Her father was shocked, still wearing his business suit from the bank. "Honey! What happened to you! Are you okay?" he asked, looking at the blood on her knees.

Lori glanced out the window into the darkness and saw a blur of something running back into the woods. She pointed hysterically. "Something was following me! Did you see it? Over there! It followed me all the way from Sally's house! I was running and I tripped and then you came along!"

Her father strained frantically to see into the blackness. "No, honey. I don't see anything. It was probably some kind of animal." His voice became firm. "You could have been attacked or seriously hurt! I don't want you out walking this late at night ever again. You call your mother or me if you ever need a ride. Do you understand me? You scared me half to death!"

Lori sighed. "Yeah, Dad. Sorry."

She stared into the forest as they drove up the street.

## CHAPTER 6

Lori woke up the next morning feeling as if a truck had hit her. Her muscles still ached, even after the Epsom salt bath she'd taken last night. She pulled herself out of bed and switched off the blaring alarm clock. Nothing was going to stop her from going to school today.

The incident last night had faded a little from her mind. She laughed to herself, rationalizing that it must have been a stray dog following her.

Lori carefully braided her long, golden hair. She chose a low V-neck sweater and a pair of tight black jeans from her closet, an outfit she'd bought last winter but hadn't had the nerve to wear. She looked at herself approvingly in the mirror as she applied a little deep-red lipstick. Lori normally wore preppy, conservative clothes, but not today.

She wondered how Jake would react to her new look. She pictured herself on the back of his motorcycle, hugging him tightly.

\*\*\*

Matt and Sally spotted Lori in the corridor after lunch. Matt let out a long whistle. "Whoa! Lori! Look at you!"

Lori's face became almost as red as her lipstick. "Hi, Matt. Hi, Sally. What do you think?" She twirled around.

Matt gave her the once-over as only a guy could do. "If I wasn't dating your best friend I'd—"

Sally elbowed him in the ribs. "What he's saying is... you look absolutely gorgeous! Totally cool threads! What's the occasion?" she asked.

Lori rolled her eyes, "What do you think? Remember? My physical science class next period? *Somebody* sits in front of me?"

Matt laughed. "What! Are you going to be the exhibit? Get it? *Physical* science?"

Sally sighed, glancing at Matt. "Just ignore this beast, Lori." She whispered, "*Somebody* is going to fall over backwards off his chair when he sees you! Hey. Where were you at lunch? We missed you."

Lori sighed. "I was in the library doing our history assignment. I thought I'd get it out of the way."

"You finished it already?" Sally asked. "But how did you find out about the first settlers of Haddonfield at the school library?"

Lori smiled. "I changed my mind and wrote about the signing of the Declaration of Independence instead. It was a lot easier." She handed the report to Sally. "Here. You owe me one. Hang onto it until Friday."

Sally hugged her. "You're the greatest! Thanks."

Matt joked. "Uh oh, Lori. Slacking off in school? Radical change in appearance? This is a serious warning sign! You've got to get help before it's too late!"

"Matt! Would you please shut up?" Sally demanded. She smiled at Lori. "You look hot. Go get him. That's an order."

The bell rang. Lori gave Sally a little salute as she walked down the hall.

\*\*\*

Lori felt all eyes upon her as she took her seat in class. She glanced around the room. Where was Jake? she wondered.

The bell rang. The seat in front of her was empty. Lori opened her book and began the reading assignment.

\*\*\*

Jake opened the door quietly and slipped his Walkman off his head. His heart jumped when he saw Lori sitting there, reading. He felt more self-conscious than ever. She was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen; in fact, she looked like a model. Her slim legs stretched out from under the desk. Suddenly she looked up, her crystal-blue eyes staring at him. She tossed her long, shiny braid over her shoulder as he awkwardly took his seat.

He feared to turn around.

What if she was just being nice yesterday?

He felt her eyes on the back of his head. He'd wait and see how she acted.

Lori touched his shoulder lightly, sending chills down his spine. She whispered, "Hi, Jake."

He turned around to face her. "Hi, Lori," he whispered.

Her red lips curled at the edges. "How come you're late? Did you just get to school?" Lori noticed that his hand was wrapped in a white sterile bandage.

Jake shifted nervously in his seat. "I... I was up late last night."

"What happened to your hand?" she asked.

The concern in her angelic voice sounded real. Maybe everything was okay.

"Can you meet me after class?" he asked. "I need to tell you something."

The smell of his leather jacket was driving her wild. She couldn't tell by the hushed tone of his voice if he planned to give her good news or bad news. "Okay," she agreed.

She stared at his blond hair through the rest of class, unable to concentrate on the assignment. She wondered if he'd even noticed her drastic efforts to look good today. He seemed distant and distracted by something.

What was he thinking?

*I'm really crushing hard on him,* she thought.

Jake pretended to read from his textbook. The nervous tension built between them with every tick of the large wall clock.

Lori's heart jumped as the bell rang, anxious for her private meeting with Jake.

\*\*\*

Lori followed Jake through the corridor bustling with students. No doubt they were all staring at the couple. Jake led her outside to the grassy courtyard, where they sat down on an iron park bench.

Lori smiled nervously, trying to ease the tension. "So. What's going on?"

"Nothing. I mean..." His eyes darted around the lawn. "I just didn't think we should talk in class."

"Well. Here we are. All alone," she offered.

He stared into her porcelain skin, still not believing that he was actually sitting here with her. "I have something for you, Lori," he finally said.

Lori was surprised, "Really? What is it?"

Jake reached into his jacket and pulled out his Walkman. "Here. There's a tape in here that I want you to listen to."

Lori started to place the headphones over her ears, but he stopped her.

"No. Listen to it later," he said.

Lori wondered what was on the tape. "So, are we still on for later?" she asked.

Jake felt relieved. "You mean the haunted house?"

"Yeah. If you're okay." She looked at his bandaged hand. "Are you still going to help me decorate?" she asked.

"Wild horses couldn't keep me away," he said before thinking. He laughed. "That sounded really corny, didn't it?"

Lori slid a little closer to him and whispered, "They couldn't keep me away either. Thanks for the... surprise. Meet us at City Hall after school."

Lori clutched the Walkman in her hand. "I've got to get to class. I'll see you later" she said.

\*\*\*

Lori rounded the corner and made her way through the crowded hallway toward her history class. She glanced over her shoulder to make sure Jake wasn't watching and placed the headphones of the Walkman on. She had three minutes before class started. Leaning against the wall, she pressed the play button.

\*\*\*

Sally waited anxiously for Lori to arrive in class, so she could get the latest details about Jake Kovac. She could feel Marsha Miller

staring at her from across the room, her eyes seething with hatred. Sally couldn't wait until Marsha found out about their party. They'd start inviting people tomorrow.

Lori rushed in at the last moment, just before the bell rang, her hands shaking.

Sally whispered, "What's wrong with you?"

Lori pulled the Walkman off her head and handed it to Sally. "Listen to this. Jake gave it to me."

Mrs. Grubbs turned off the lights in the classroom and started a film about United States history.

Sally slipped the Walkman on.

Sounds of chains rattling and howling wolves filled her ears. Drums thumped faster and faster. Wild guitar and bass chords melted into an eerie melody.

Jake's deep and hauntingly beautiful voice came in,

*He's going to get you. He'll follow you home.*

*He's been waiting and watching. You're never alone.*

*He's out in the woods, he's been waiting for you.*

*When he gets you alone, your young life is through.*

*I'm the bogeyman, baby, and I'll never die!*

*I'm the bogeyman, baby, and that's no lie!*

*I'm the bogeyman, baby, so don't even try*

*To get away from me.*

Sally giggled, handing the Walkman back to Lori. "It's good. It's weird, but good. This will be perfect for the Halloween party."

Lori remembered that she hadn't told anyone about what happened in the woods last night.

Could Jake have been the one who was following her?

Would he have had enough time to cross town to follow her home?

Lori thought about the bandage on Jake's hand. What had happened to him? Could he have fallen in the woods? Was he even in the woods? she wondered. Lori shivered.

"So he gave you the tape. What else happened?" Sally probed.

Lori relaxed a little, thinking of Jake's kind eyes and gorgeous face. He wouldn't scare her like that. She realized that her imagination was working overtime and she began looking forward to seeing him again.

"Nothing," she said. "He's going to meet us later at City Hall to get started on the haunted house decorations."



# CHAPTER

## 7

Jake pulled up in front of City Hall on his motorcycle. He was glad that he'd taken the time off this morning to recharge the battery and was relieved that it was only a minor problem. Matt's Jeep was parked out front. Jake felt a pang of anticipation as he thought about Lori. He hoped she liked the song he'd put together last night. He took off his helmet and walked up the long staircase toward the entrance of the old building.

Sally, Lori and Matt were busy in the basement opening dusty boxes of junk that Mayor Jamison had gotten out of the storage cage for the kids to use as props for the haunted house. The boxes were filled with old paper plates, cans of paint, clothing, curtains and hundreds of other discarded items.

Mayor Jamison handed Sally a fat petty cash envelope filled with crisp twenty-dollar bills. He told her, "This is for buying refreshments and to get flyers printed to advertise the event. This is all the money we have to work with. You must provide receipts for each and every purchase. There's a shopping list inside for the bare essentials we'll have to get. Spend it wisely, that's all we've got."

Lori asked, "Mayor Jamison? Is it okay if we have a live rock band play at the party? Our friend offered to play."

The Mayor rubbed his chin. "A live band. Hmmmm. That's a good idea and would probably draw a pretty large crowd. It's fine with me as long as they can bring their own equipment." He looked at his watch. "I've got to get going, kids. Keep me updated on your progress." The mayor walked up the stairs and nearly crashed right into Jake, who was standing at the top.

"Excuse me," Jake said politely as the mayor hurried off to his office.

Jake smiled as he looked down at Lori. His tall frame almost filled the doorway. He pointed to a large cardboard box that he'd brought in. "I brought a surprise." His eyes searched the room. "So this is it?" he asked.

Matt complained, "Yeah. This is going to be a lot of work. Just look at this place."

"Jake, the mayor said you and your band can play. Isn't that great?" Lori called as she watched Jake lug the heavy box down the stairs.

He pulled the box across the floor. "Cool. I'll call the guys later and tell them the good news. So, what did you think of the tape?" he asked.

Lori felt foolish for thinking that Jake might have been following her and was glad that she didn't mention it to anyone. "It's really good... and spooky. Does all your music sound like that?"

Jake laughed, "No, no. That was just something I put together for the haunted house. Most of our stuff is just good ol' rock 'n' roll."

Jake looked around the basement. "Did the mayor say where he wanted us to set up the stage?"

Matt pointed. "What about over there in the storage cage?" He explained, "There's plenty of room in there if we move out the boxes and we can decorate it so it looks like you and your band are monsters in a giant cage!"

"Yeah!" Sally added, "We can line up the filing cabinets so that the maze ends right by the band. They can follow the music to the end."

Matt pointed to the huge box Jake had dragged in. "What's in there? A dead body?"

Jake grinned. "It's better. Just a little something I borrowed from the theater."

Lori looked at the box and then at Jake. "How'd you get it here? On your motorcycle?"

"No. I borrowed my buddy's pickup," he explained.

"So what's inside?" Lori questioned. "It looks so heavy."

"I'll let Matt do the honors," Jake said, handing Matt his Swiss Army knife.

Matt cut the tape and Sally dug in, struggling to pull something heavy out of the box.

"Grab that end," Matt told her.

"Ow!" Sally cried. She pulled her fingers from the box to reveal a small cut dripping with blood.

Matt heaved the item out of the box and set it on the floor.

Jake rushed over. "Sally! Are you okay?" he asked, feeling guilty that he hadn't warned them. "That thing is sharp."

Lori stared at the blade of the old guillotine on the floor. "Yuck! Is that thing real?"

"I don't think so," Jake answered. "They use it as a prop over at the theater. But it's about as close to the real thing as you can get."

Sally sucked her finger, "Look what it did to me!" She eyed the crude metal blade with fear. "I don't think it would be a good idea to have this thing out at the party. Someone could get hurt."

"We'll just put some silver duct tape over the blade part and secure it so it can't fall down. This is perfect for The Scream Factory," Matt said.

Lori stepped away from the blade, looking disgusted. "I wonder how many people had their heads chopped off with something like that? It gives me the creeps."

Jake laughed. "Yeah. It is pretty scary."

Matt held the little knife in the palm of his hand. "Thanks, man," he said. "Mind if I borrow it a little longer? This knife is just what I need to start digging into all of these other boxes."

"This is going to be the best haunted house ever," Lori commented. "Hey, Jake. Would you design our flyer for The Scream Factory? We need a really creepy looking haunted house with the time and address on it. Oh, and I need to take it to the printer tonight."

Jake winked. "Are you saying my art is creepy?"

Lori blushed. "No. You're just a good artist. Come on. You know I didn't mean anything by that."

Jake was flattered that she even knew he was an artist. "Of course I'll do it. I'd better get started right now so I can make my deadline."

"Thanks." Lori looked over at Matt and Sally, who were pulling old costumes out of a box. Matt threw on a red cape and mask.

Sally fell into his arms. "My hero!" she cried in her most theatrical voice.

"My darling!" Matt dipped her backward, giving her a long kiss.

Lori cleared her throat. "Come on, you two. We've got a lot of work to do. Let's start throwing these old curtains and sheets over the

filing cabinets."

Sally pulled a dusty piece of drapery from a box. Matt began rearranging the cabinets into a series of twisting and turning walls while the girls threw sheets over the tops of them.

Within an hour, Jake had completed the flyer and the maze was all set up. The four kids sat on some cardboard boxes.

Sally looked at Jake's artwork. "This is great! It looks so professional."

"Thanks," Jake said. "I've always loved art." He stole a glance at Lori and smiled shyly. "You guys did a great job on the maze. Want to take me for a tour?"

Lori stood smiling and took him by the hand. "Right this way. All we have to do now is decorate it."

"Ouch!" he cried.

Lori felt his hand jerk away from hers. He held up his bandaged hand. "Sorry." He smiled. "It's still a little sore."

He grabbed her hand with his other. Lori held her breath, wondering again how he'd hurt it. "Jake?" she asked. "What happened to your hand?"

She had to know if he was the one following her last night.

He gave her fingers a little squeeze that made her break out in goose bumps. "Nothing," he answered quickly. "Just a little accident."

Accident?

She pressed on. "What kind of ... accident?"

Jake's face turned red. "The bike fell over on me when I was working on it this morning. That's all," he said.

Lori sighed, relaxing a little. "Come on," she told him.

Jake followed her through the dim twists of the maze, feeling electrified. The sun was going down outside, and with every precious second, the darkness of night crept in through the basement windows. At the end of the maze, Jake stopped. Suddenly and without thinking of the consequences, he pulled Lori close to him and kissed her on the mouth. He felt her body go rigid, and then relax as she kissed him back.

Jake stopped and pushed her away, hoping he hadn't frightened her. "I'm sorry. I just... couldn't help myself."

Lori, still light-headed from the rush of adrenaline, smiled. "No. I'm glad you did."

Jake wanted to hold her, to kiss her again, but he stopped himself. "It's getting dark. I'd better get over to the printer before they close so our flyers will be ready by tomorrow morning," he said.

Lori took a deep breath. "Okay. Get some petty cash from Sally." She gave his hand a little squeeze. "I'll see you tomorrow."

She watched Jake disappear through the maze as she leaned against a filing cabinet, feeling dazed by his powerful kiss.

\*\*\*

Outside the building, a dark figure emerged from the woods, peering at the dim lights glowing in the basement. He'd followed their light, tinkling laughter through the darkness. He was close enough now to hear the voices of teenagers... talking and laughing.

Slowly and carefully, he moved closer.

\*\*\*

The sound of breaking glass echoed through the basement.

"What was that?" Matt said, jumping to his feet.

Lori asked nervously, "Jake left already, didn't he?"

Sally stood behind Matt. "Yeah, he's long gone." Sally pointed to the corner window. "It came from over there. Look! The window is shattered!"

Matt pulled a black mask over his face, looking ridiculous. "Have no fear, ladies! Matt man is here!"

Sally rolled her eyes at Lori as Matt charged off through the maze singing, "Here I come to save the day!"

The girls timidly followed behind him. "Matt! Be careful back there!" Sally called.

The room was silent. Lori yelled, "Matt? Where are you? Did you find anything? Matt?"

Sally looked up at the broken window with a concerned expression. "Matt? Are you okay?"

As they walked through the final turn in the maze, Matt suddenly popped up. "*Boo!*"

The girls screamed.

Sally was furious. "You jerk! You scared us to death!"

Matt cackled. "That was the idea. This is the exact spot I'm going to hide when the kids come through the maze."

Lori took a deep breath. "What about the window? Did you find anything?"

The cold wind whistled through the basement. "Nothing but broken glass. Someone broke it from the outside."

"Who would do such a stupid thing... and why?" Sally asked.

The lights went out, leaving them in total darkness. Lori made a little swallowing noise and whispered, "What if it's Michael Myers?"

"Would you please shut up, Lori," Matt snapped. "Michael Myers doesn't exist."

A scratching sound came from the window.

Sally was about to scream when the power groaned back on.

Lori grabbed Sally and Matt. "Let's get out of here."

Matt and Sally agreed and the three of them left. Matt flicked off the basement lights. Sally turned around to take one last look at the maze before they shut the door.

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In a blur, a white face peered through the broken window, staring into the dark basement.

## CHAPTER 8

Lori and Sally stood in the school courtyard the following morning. Sally pointed. "Look. There's Jake. He looks fine today."

Lori felt flushed as she watched him walk across the grass. He wore a pair of faded jeans and a dark green sweater which made his blond, longish hair look like gold in the morning sunlight. "Wow," she said, breathing out.

"He sure is a good kisser," Lori commented, and waited for Sally's reaction.

"What? When did this happen?" Sally asked.

Lori giggled. "In the maze. He grabbed me with those strong arms and kissed me. He said he couldn't stop himself."

Sally's eyes opened wide. "Oh my gosh. This is better than those romance novels!" she squealed. Sally fanned herself with her hand. "He couldn't stop himself! His burning desire was unleashed! His passion was uncontrollable!"

Lori shot her a warning look. "Be quiet. Here he comes."

"Good morning," Jake said. He proudly showed them the flyers for The Scream Factory which he'd had printed on bright orange paper.

"Wow. These look great. I can't wait to start handing them out," said Lori.

Jake gave each of the girls a stack and handed Sally the receipt. He rolled up the sleeves of his sweater. "I was going to slip them in everyone's locker at lunch today." He pointed to the bottom corner of the flyer, where he'd added a little picture of his band. "I hope you don't mind. I just wanted to get a little exposure."

Sally raised her eyebrows, trying to imagine Jake kissing Lori. "You're quite the marketing man as well as an artist. Is there anything you don't do?"

Jake winked. "I don't do windows. Hey. I'll see you two later."

The girls giggled to themselves as Jake walked away.

Lori looked curiously at Sally. "So, do you think he's boyfriend material?" she asked.

Sally lowered her eyes with an annoyed look on her face. "As if! I already have a boyfriend."

"I meant for *me* dummy!" Lori laughed.

Sally nudged her playfully. "Sure. Why not? He's cute and he can't seem to keep his hot lips off of you!"

Lori looked at her stack of flyers, ignoring Sally's immature teasing. "Shall we? We've still got fifteen minutes before first period."

\*\*\*

The two girls stood in front of the main entrance passing out the orange papers. Students eagerly grabbed them up as they poured into the building.

Lori pointed. "Uh oh. Here comes trouble."

Marsha Miller, dressed in an expensive black dress, pushed her way through the courtyard toward Sally and Lori, with three of her friends.

Marsha sneered, grabbing a flyer from Sally, causing her to drop the entire stack.

Marsha growled, "So you're the one having the losers only party? I should have known. We'll just see where Matt winds up, won't we?"

Sally laughed in her face, "What's the matter Marsha" Afraid no one will show up at your party now? The whole school will be at City Hall, including Matt."

"In your dreams, you dweeb!" Marsha spat out.

Two football players stopped to help Sally pick up her scattered flyers. One of them looked up at Marsha. "Hey. Thanks for the invitation, Marsha, but we can't make it. Maybe we'll catch you later at The Scream Factory. Everyone's talking about the live band that's playing. I've heard they're really good."

Enraged, Marsha pushed her way past Sally, almost knocking her over. Marsha tossed her hair over her shoulder and shot an evil glare at her rival.

Lori giggled. "Success is the best revenge."

Sally continued handing flyers to students as they walked past her. "Yeah. I had no idea it would be such a big hit. But how did word get



around so fast?"

Lori pointed to the student parking lot, where orange papers dotted most of the car windshields. They laughed together. "Jake."

\*\*\*

At lunch, Sally went off campus with Matt to grab a burger.

Lori combed the cafeteria and halls until she finally caught up with Jake, who was posting a flyer on the school notice board.

He turned around as she called his name. "Hey, Jake."

Jake grinned at her as he stepped back to look at the flyer on the board. "Hey, Lori. How's it going?"

She stared at him for a moment.

He'd changed somehow, she thought.

She smiled, ignoring the uneasy feeling. "The response to our party is going great. I've had people coming up to me all day letting me know they'll be there."

Jake stuffed his hands in his pockets. "Yeah. I know. I feel like some kind of celebrity. People I don't even know, which is almost everybody, are talking to me now and asking me about my band. I don't feel invisible anymore. You know?"

Two cheerleaders walked past Jake and smiled. The tall brunette shook her pom-poms at him playfully. "Hi, Jake," they called.

His face reddened as they passed by. "You see what I mean? This is amazing. Thanks a lot, Lori... for everything."

Lori fluffed her hair when he wasn't looking. She wondered if he would move on to greener pastures now that the whole school, especially the girls, were noticing him. "You're welcome. But I really didn't do anything."

Jake put his hands on her shoulders and stared at her intensely. "You've done everything. You saw something in me when everyone else just passed me by. Didn't you?"

His gaze was hypnotic. "Yes," she admitted. "I just never had the nerve to say anything."

Jake leaned close to her face and whispered, "I've been watching you for a long time. But I never could bring myself to talk to you. I

figured a beautiful girl like you would just laugh at me... or worse. You make me happy, Lori."

As he parted his lips to kiss two freshman boys walked up to them, both wearing black band T-shirts and jeans. "Look. It's Jake," one of them whispered. The one with glasses said, "Hey, man. Heard your band's pretty cool. We'll see you Halloween."

Jake and Lori laughed as they walked down the hall, slipping flyers into lockers.

\*\*\*

Sally hopped out of Matt's Jeep, stuffing the last bite of hamburger into her mouth. "I've got to stop by my locker before class. I'll meet you after school," she called. She blew him a little kiss.

Sally ran to her locker and struggled to pry it open. She only had a minute to get to class. The flimsy locker door flew open.

Sally screamed.

Inside the locker sat a huge jack-o'-lantern with a grotesquely carved face and a large butcher knife through its eye. The knife pinned to the pumpkin one of the orange flyers, which had the word "REVENGE" written across it, in what appeared to be fresh blood. Taped over Matt's picture there was a little note, written in the same scratchy writing.

Sally's hands trembled as she grabbed the note and read, "You'll be the only one screaming at The Scream Factory. This Halloween will be your last!"

Sally left the locker open and ran to the bathroom, feeling as if she were going to be sick. She splashed cold water on her face and looked up into the mirror. Her skin looked pale. She took a deep breath, rationally deciding to report the incident to the principal.

The bell rang and the halls were deserted.

Sally walked quickly toward her locker, the metal door still hanging open. She forced herself to glance at it as she walked by.

A sinking feeling swept through her body.

The locker was completely empty except for her picture of Matt, which had been crumpled and thrown down on the floor.

Panic set in. Flashes of the Haddonfield Halloween murder victims, the school pictures that were printed in the old newspaper articles, appeared in her mind.

The jack-o'-lantern was the trademark of Michael Myers.

They never found his body.

And it was almost Halloween!

*Am I going insane?* she thought, the horrible prank still fresh in her mind.

*A prank, it's just a stupid prank,* she tried to convince herself, not doing a very good job of it.

\*\*\*

In history class, Sally stared at the blackboard, unable to concentrate. She chewed her nails, a habit she'd broken nearly a year ago.

Sally briefly filled Lori in on the disturbing locker incident and suggested that maybe they call the party off.

Lori looked at her in disbelief. "What? Some idiot is just trying to scare you. I can't believe that you're letting this get to you. Trust me." Lori peered across the room and lowered her voice to a whisper. "No one is out to get you, except maybe her."

Sally glanced at Marsha, who was writing something in her notebook.

It hadn't occurred to Sally that Marsha might be behind this. Yeah. It all made sense now. Marsha was certainly low enough to pull a childish stunt like that.

The class bell rang. Sally jumped out of her seat to catch up with Marsha. She tapped her on the shoulder. "Hey, Marsha. I got your little Halloween bouquet. You're really desperate, aren't you?"

Marsha jerked away from Sally, her nostrils flaring. "Don't you ever touch me you... you disgusting little slut! I have no idea what you're talking about. Just leave me alone or you'll be hearing from my lawyer!"

"Your lawyer?" Sally laughed. "Give me a break! I should be the one telling you to leave me alone. And I mean it. Stop the stupid

pranks. I know you were the one who called me and I know you put the threat in my locker. So just back off!"

A small crowd was gathering around the girls.

Someone yelled, "Catfight!"

Sally felt her adrenaline pumping as Marsha shoved her hard in the chest. "It's your move!" she sneered.

The crowd had grown from five to thirty students within seconds. They cheered them on.

Sally, blinded by rage, lost all control and raised her fist.

Lori grabbed Sally from behind just before she could take a swing, and dragged her backward through the crowd. "Sally! Get a grip on yourself!"

Marsha threw her leather backpack over her shoulder and called out casually, "See you later, losers!"

Sally's heart pounded as she watched Marsha glide away down the hall as if nothing had happened.

The bloodthirsty crowd broke up as Lori waved her arms angrily and called out, "Go on, you dorks! The show is over!"

# CHAPTER

## 9

Matt was sitting in his Jeep, waiting in front of the school for the girls. He stared at Sally's beet-red face. Her fists and teeth were still clenched in anger. "What's wrong with you?" he asked.

"You're *ex-girlfriend* attacked me. That's what's wrong," she said with a hint of blame in her shaky voice.

Matt looked surprised. "Marsha? No kidding! What'd you say to her?"

"I don't believe this!" Sally cried. "I tell you I've been *attacked* and you ask me what I said to *her*? Well the answer is nothing! Absolutely nothing!"

Matt could see how upset she was by the tears that were welling up in her green eyes. He placed his hand on her knee. "Sorry, Sally," he said. "It's just that I've never seen her act like that before. Are you okay?"

Lori couldn't believe that Matt was being so dense! She angrily spoke up in Sally's defense. "Marsha has been threatening us for days. She's really steamed about our party because practically the whole school will be there. We think she put the death threat in Sally's locker."

"Death threat?" Matt gasped. He looked at Sally for an explanation.

Sally told him about the pumpkin and message she'd found in her locker after lunch.

Matt was deeply disturbed by the similarities between what Sally described and the jack-o'-lantern and writing on the wall he'd seen in the old Myers place a few days earlier.

Sally added, "And on top of that, whoever put it in my locker stole all of my books. They even tore down your picture and crumpled it up!"

Matt didn't know what to think; after all, he'd dated Marsha for a few months and she'd never done anything truly mean to him.

Except when he broke up with her.

He'd had to call it off after she'd started telling him what to wear and who to socialize with. Matt didn't like being pushed around by anyone. He remembered his part-time job at the hardware store, which was owned by Marsha's uncle. The day after he broke up with her, he was fired, or "laid off" as they'd worded it.

Matt asked, "Did you report it to the principal or anyone?"

"No. My locker was totally empty when I returned. I don't know what to think. It was so horrible," Sally said.

Jake Kovac pulled up beside the Jeep. He lifted his helmet. "Hey, guys. Are you on your way to City Hall?"

Lori sat up in the backseat, looking at Jake. He looked fabulous—and a little dangerous, sitting on the leather seat of his motorcycle. "Yeah!" she cried over the rumbling of his engine. "We'll see you there."

Jake motioned for Lori to join him. "How about a ride on the wild side?"

"Sounds great," she answered, licking her lips as she climbed out of the Jeep.

Jake handed Lori a helmet and mounted the back of the bike, the vibrating chrome adding to her excitement. She waved at Sally and Matt. "We'll meet you," she said and hugged Jake's lean body, as they pulled away from Haddonfield High, disappearing down the road.

Jake yelled over the sound of the engine, "Let's stop by my house. There's something there that I need to get."

"Okay," Lori shouted. She clasped her hands together around Jake's waist, watching the trees of the thickly wooded forest move past as they rode, the bike hugging the curves of the gently sloped road.

They rounded the corner onto Ripley Road. Jake sped up a little as they approached the old Myers house.

It still looked creepy, even in broad daylight, Lori thought.

She caught a glimpse of something in the tiny attic window that made her heart stop.

"Jake! Jake! I just saw something in there! Someone's in the old Myers house!" she cried.

*Something is watching!*

Jake downshifted and pulled to the side of the road across the street. "Where?" he asked.

Lori hid behind Jake's body as she pointed to the attic. "Up there! I think I saw a face looking at us. It wasn't a jack-o'-lantern like the other night. It was moving! What if he's come back?"

Jake stared at the tattered curtain blowing through the window until his eyes went out of focus. "I don't see anything. It was probably just a shadow from the trees on the curtain. This old place can play tricks on your eyes."

Lori protested, "No. I really saw something"

*Really... I think.*

Jake turned around and touched her face. "Maybe you did," he said. "But if you're suggesting that we actually go inside that spook house to check it out, you're crazy."

Lori giggled nervously. "No way! Let's get out of here" She watched the attic window, feeling more than a little uneasy, as they drove away.

At the end of the road, Jake pulled over and grabbed the mail out of the box. Then they slowly drove up the long dirt road to his place, which was nestled against the forest on the hillside. White fences surrounded several acres of property beside the house.

Lori commented, "Wow. It's really isolated up here. Doesn't it freak you out sometimes, being so close to the Myers house?"

Jake turned off the ignition and helped Lori off the bike. "Not really. I can play my music as loud as I want and no one ever complains. Not even Michael Myers."

*Michael Myers.*

The name stuck in her mind, the horrible stories.

"What about your parents?" Lori asked.

Jake shrugged. "They're importers, so they go out of the country a lot. Right now they're in Japan. They just stock the freezer with pizza and leave me the run of the place. I don't really mind. I'm used to being alone."

Lori smoothed her hair. "Well you're not alone now."

*At least I don't think so.*

Jake fished the key from his pocket and smiled at her. "You mean I'm not alone, like at this moment or... I'm not alone, as in something is going on between us?"

"Both." She smiled. "I think, that is if you..."

Jake touched her lips with his fingers and then gave her a kiss. He stepped backward to stare at her creamy skin and rosy cheeks. "You're for real, aren't you?"

"Oh yes," she said breathlessly.

He smiled nervously as he leaned against the door and it pushed open, then his expression suddenly became serious. "Hey, that's weird. I'd swear I locked the door this morning. I always lock the door."

Lori backed away from the porch. "Could someone have come over who has a key?"

Jake peeked inside. He whispered, "No. The only one who has a key is my older brother. But he's away at college in Los Angeles. This is really strange. Stay out here while I check it out."

Lori paced back and forth on the porch as Jake disappeared inside. She caught a glimpse of the old Myers house down the road, sending chills down her spine. She was sure she'd seen a face in there. "Jake? Is everything okay?" she called.

Timidly, Lori opened the door and let herself in. She gawked at the unusually creepy decor of the house. Tribal African masks hung on the walls among mounted heads deer, buffalo and a bear. They seemed to watch her every move with dead, glassy eyes.

She stepped across the hardwood floor and of peered up the staircase. "Jake," she called softly. "Where are you?"

*Where are you?*

A low, vicious growling came from behind a closed door upstairs. The hair on the back of Lori's neck stood on end.

Not daring to take another step in any direction, she stood frozen, staring at the closed door.

"Jake?" she called. The door creaked open and Lori sucked in her breath.

Jake stood at the top of the stairs wearing a hideous wolf mask, clutching a large bag.



Lori laughed at herself for having been so scared just a moment ago. "That is the ugliest thing I've ever seen," she said.

Jake pulled off the mask and walked down the stairs. "I didn't know you were in here. I was just getting together some stuff to use as props for The Scream Factory," he explained.

Lori took a deep breath. "You almost made *me* scream," she said. She looked around nervously, remembering that they'd found the door unlocked.

Jake followed her glance. "Don't worry," he assured her. "There's nothing missing from the house and there's no one in here but us. I checked it out. I must have rushed out this morning and forgot to lock up." He opened the bag. "Here, look at this. I've got all kinds of masks and old clothes in here that we can use to decorate. Let's get out of here."

"Let's," she agreed.

Lori held the heavy bag of decorations in her lap, sandwiched between their bodies. Jake started the bike and they drove down the road, away from the creepy Myers house.

Lori felt relaxed and happy. Although it hadn't been spoken outright, she knew that she and Jake were now a couple.

She squeezed him tightly as they rounded a turn on Old Ranch Road, which was lined with tall green trees. Lori breathed in the fresh, cool air. Orange and brown leaves tumbled behind the motorcycle as they sped down the road.

Lori tilted her head backward and watched the tops of the pine trees rush by.

Suddenly, a loud, crisp crack filled the air, followed by a creaking groan.

Lori's eyes followed a tree leaning toward the road and realized a split-second later that the towering pine was falling in front of the speeding motorcycle.

"*Jake! Look out!*" she screamed.

Jake's body went rigid in alarm as the giant tree crashed to the ground, one hundred yards in front of them, blocking the entire road.

Jake hit the brakes and the motorcycle swerved sideways towards the shoulder, the distance to the wall of branches before them closing in at lightning speed.

Lori screamed and covered her eyes as the bike leaned terrifyingly toward the ground, everything feeling as if it were happening in slow motion.

A cloud of tire smoke and dust billowed up around them.

Lori opened her eyes and stared in disbelief at the giant tree that stretched across the entire width of the road.

*What happened!*

There was bright red blood all over the back of Jake's leather jacket. She screamed, her eyes wide with horror, when she saw that her white blouse was soaked with it. "Oh my God! Oh my God! Somebody help us!" she cried, her voice echoing down the desolate road.

Jake got off the bike and touched the blood on Lori's shirt. "Shhhhhh. It's okay," he told her, licking his fingers. "It's just the fake blood that was in the bag. It must have burst when we stopped so suddenly. I had almost a gallon in there. We're not hurt."

Lori shook her head in disbelief, the sight of the blood, real or not, made her stomach turn. They had almost crashed. "Oh God. That was so scary. We almost crashed!"

Jake took off his helmet and stretched his shaky legs, which had tensed up when he was trying to stop.

He couldn't understand what had just happened.

Jake ran his fingers through his hair, in some sort of a daze, as he followed the tree to its end. "Lori! Come here!" he shouted.

Lori followed him into the clearing from where the tree had fallen. She gasped.

Fresh sap oozed from the neatly cut tree stump. She screamed, "It was cut! Someone did this on purpose!"

*Someone tried to kill us!*

Jake searched the woods with nervous eyes. "Let's go. We'll report this when we get into town.

Jake wheeled the motorcycle around the tree. He had to kick start the bike a couple of times before the engine groaned on.

Lori was trembling with fear. She quickly picked up the sticky bag of fake blood and hopped on the back of the bike, frightened and anxious to get out of there.

# CHAPTER

## 10

Jake and Lori entered the lobby to the City Hall building. The old clerk nearly had a heart attack when she saw Lori's bloodstained blouse. Lori, a little embarrassed by her appearance, quickly explained that it was fake blood and asked to use the telephone. She dialed 911 and was immediately connected to the police department. She explained the details of the bizarre accident to an officer, who dispatched a patrol car to the scene. He told her they'd be contacting them later for more information.

Satisfied that the matter was now in the hands of the police, Lori relaxed a little as they went down to the basement to help Matt and Sally with the decorating.

Sally's face went white. "Lori! Jake! What happened to you guys? Matt! Come here quick!"

Jake explained what had happened to them as Sally gawked at the bloody mess all over their clothing.

"Don't worry," Jake assured them. "We weren't hurt and the police are investigating right now."

Matt looked worried. "So you think someone tried to ... kill you?" He hoped they didn't notice that his voice was shaky. "Are you sure?"

Lori sat down on a crate. "Sawed off tree stumps don't lie," she said. "Whoever did it must have been waiting for us to drive by and pushed it in the road at the last minute."

Sally's eyes opened wide. "What if it was... *Michael Myers*?" Her voice became squeaky and high-pitched. "What if he's come back?"

Matt rolled his eyes. "Sally, for the last time, Michael Myers isn't coming back - that is, if he ever even existed. You've been watching too many horror movies. This conversation is getting a little too stupid for me. I'm going back to work on the maze and I could use some help."

Sally protested as he turned his back on her. "Oh yeah? Well, how do you explain the accident? Who would try to hurt Lori and Jake? I don't think that Marsha Miller would go that far."

Matt whipped around. "Who do I look like, Inspector Gadget? Maybe the city was clearing it or *maybe* somebody needed some firewood. You people need to get a grip! We have a lot of work to do around here," he said.

Sally thought about it. "I guess you're right. We've all been a little tense the last couple of days," she mumbled. She winked at Lori and slipped into the maze after Matt.

Jake pulled an envelope from his pocket and showed it to Lori. "I meant to ask you, do you know this girl, Marsha Miller? She handed me this envelope in the parking lot after school," he said.

"Do I know Marsha Miller?" Lori asked sarcastically as she tore open the sealed envelope. "She's only the rudest, richest, meanest, worst enemy of mine. Actually, Sally's the one she really hates, but she takes it out on me because we're friends."

"Oh. Gotcha," Jake said, realizing he'd struck a nerve.

Lori removed the invitation from the black envelope and read, "Hi, Jake. I'm having a wicked Halloween bash and am just *dying* to have you as a guest. Marsha. P.S. Here's a little something for you and your band if you can play at my party." Lori reached inside the envelope and found a check.

Jake grabbed the check. He gasped, "Whoa. Four hundred bucks! I can't believe it! Who is this girl?"

Lori felt angry and defeated.

She spat, "That *girl* is a conniving, evil you-know-what!" Lori explained, "She's been on the warpath ever since Sally started dating Matt. She went nuclear when she found out that we're having our party on the same night as hers, and now she's stealing our entertainment too!" Lori angrily pounded her fist into a cardboard box.

Jake had to stop himself from laughing at Lori's childish tantrum. "Wait a second, Lori. Hold on. Who says I'm going to play at her party?" he asked.

Lori looked deeply into his eyes. He seemed to be amused by the whole thing. "You mean... you'd turn down that kind of money for the sake of The Scream Factory?"

Jake took her hand in his. "No. I'm turning it down because I have a date that night with my new girlfriend, who happens to be the hottest girl in Haddonfield *and* I already have a previous booking to play The Scream Factory. I'll give her check back tomorrow."

Lori was breathless. She whispered, "Your girlfriend?"

Jake gently stroked her hair. "Yeah. If that's okay with you. I really like you, Lori. I *really* do." He peeled off his leather jacket. "I can't stop thinking about you. It's like you've put some kind of spell on me."

She felt high as she digested his words. "I know what you mean. I'm crazy about you too," she admitted.

Sally walked up behind them. "What's this about Marsha Miller?"

Lori beamed at Jake. "Marsha offered *my boyfriend* four hundred bucks to play at her stupid party. But he's turning her down and giving her back her money."

Sally teased, "Your boyfriend, huh? Congratulations, you two." Sally gave Jake a friendly hug. "You're the greatest, Jake, for sticking with us. Besides, you'll get better exposure at our party. The whole school will be here, from the jocks to the geeks, unlike Marsha's small, private party for Haddonfield's financially gifted."

Jake squeezed Lori's hand again. "You guys are my friends. I'd never turn my back on you. Besides, if I played her party, I'd just be hired help like a monkey on a string."

Lori giggled as she looked down at her bloody blouse. "This stuff is never going to come out. What did you make it with anyway, Jake?"

"Fruit punch concentrate and tomato juice," he said. "I developed it last summer when I was working for the theater. It's my Romeo and Juliet special mix."

"How appropriate. Just don't go killing yourselves or anything." Sally laughed. "Hey. Do you guys want to meet us for pizza later?"

"Not like this I don't. I'll have to go home and change first," Lori said. Jake nodded in agreement. She grinned. "I'm officially donating this shirt to The Scream Factory." She poked at the sticky trash bag. "If the rest of the clothes that were in the bag look anything like this, our work is cut out for us."

"Okay, you two," Sally said, "I'm going back to check in on Matt. He's weaving a giant spiderweb out of nylon rope. We'll meet you at about six at the pizza parlor."

"Okay. It's a date," Lori said.

Jake pulled the bloody garments from the bag. "Yep, they're red all right. All we have to do is stuff the clothes with some newspaper and put some masks on for heads and we'll have ourselves an instant ghoulish fest."

Lori dug around and found some newspaper which she crumpled up into balls, while Jake carefully stuffed them into an old pair of pants.

After he'd filled the old clothes, he chose masks for each figure. Lori placed the wolfman mask over the collar of one of the headless bodies that lay on the ground. "There," she said, standing back to look at their accomplishment. "This is perfect. It almost looks as scary as when you were wearing it in your house!" She giggled.

Jake playfully crept toward her, growling. Lori shook her head. "Oh, no you don't. You've scared me enough for one day." She looked at her watch. "We'd better get going soon. I want to get home before my parents see me like this."

"Why don't I give you a lift home and wait for you to change? Then we'll just go from your house," Jake offered.

Lori flashed back to the accident earlier. "Why don't you give me a lift home and I'll come pick you up in my dad's car?" she suggested, not wanting to sound like a wimp. She added, "It's going to be cold tonight, and besides, my parents would kill me if they found out I was riding around on the back of a motorcycle."

# CHAPTER

## 11

Jake drove the motorcycle slowly down the side streets toward Lori's house.

Funny thing was, she didn't have to give him any directions.

As they passed the convenience store by Sally's house, Lori remembered her horrifying walk home the other night. That awful feeling of being stalked flooded her mind.

Jake seemed to be glancing off into the forest by her house.

"Shoot!" Lori said as her house came into view. "My dad's car is in the driveway. Stop here and I'll walk the rest of the way. I'll have to sneak in through the back door."

Jake wished he was driving a car right now, he felt like some kind of outlaw on his motorcycle. Instead of pulling over to let Lori off, he turned off the engine and glided silently, stopping just before her driveway. "Old trade secret," he whispered as she hopped off, looking at him a little strangely.

"What's on your mind?" he asked.

Lori looked dazed. She whispered, "I just... wondered. How did you know where my house was?"

His gaze intensified, making her knees feel wobbly. "I know a lot of things about you."

*Know things?*

The setting sun cast a gleaming orange glow on them, making the whole moment seem unreal. Lori still watched his face, unable to find the words to describe the mixed emotions she was feeling. Jake continued, his voice soft and deep. "I know that you like it when I kiss you," he leaned forward, "like this..."

Lori's heart fluttered as she returned the kiss, still feeling a little confused. Jake seemed to change moods so often, so unpredictably. Or was it just her, overanalyzing him? She couldn't tell. The last few days had been so strange, so unusual.

She was angry at herself for feeling suspicious of him.

*He probably thinks I'm acting like a jerk.*



"I'll pick you up in an hour," she said as cheerfully as she could.

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Lori opened the back door and crept past the living room, where her dad sat watching the evening news. "Lori? Is that you?" he called.

A little flustered, she answered, edging her way up the stairs. "Yeah, Dad. I'm going to take a shower. Is it okay if I borrow the car to meet my friends for pizza?"

"Okay, honey," he called, not turning away from the TV screen.

Lori let out a relieved breath and carefully tucked her ruined blouse in the bottom of the hamper. She jumped in the hot shower, savoring the warm, steamy heat, then blow-dried her straight blond hair and tied it back with a red ribbon. She chose a black miniskirt with a pair of black tights and a bright, red sweater from her closet.

Outside she started up her dad's blue Honda. She felt awkward behind the wheel. She'd had her driver's license for nearly a year and had driven plenty of times, but chose to walk most of the time to keep in shape.

Lori drove through town and passed the pizza place that they'd be going to in a little while. Matt's Jeep was already parked outside.

She stiffened as she turned onto Old Ranch Road, where they'd had the accident that afternoon. A squad car with its blue and red lights flashing was pulled over to the side of the road. A bright flashlight shone into Lori's eyes as she passed. The huge tree that had almost killed them earlier had been moved to the side of the road.

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Officer Baker bit into his raspberry-filled jelly donut, an award which he felt he deserved after being assigned to remove the giant tree from the road. Sometimes the department chief still treated him like a rookie, even though he'd been on the police force for nearly five years now.

He watched the blue sedan disappear down the road and carefully pulled his swimsuit edition magazine out from under his seat. He'd

wait a few minutes before he reported back into the station, he decided.

Baker opened the worn pages to his favorite centerfold and closed his eyes. He imagined that he was lying on the beach with the exotic beauty on the magazine page. He could almost feel the warmth of the sandy beach...

Officer Baker jumped up and hit his head against the ceiling as something plowed into the side of his patrol car, causing the black-and-white to jolt.

He threw the magazine into the backseat and shouted, "What the-"

Before he could finish his sentence, a hulking figure appeared next to his window and grabbed at the door handle.

Baker screamed in shock as his scorching, thirty-two-ounce coffee spilled across his lap. "What the hell are you doing!" he yelled.

As Baker grabbed for his shotgun, the figure peered inside the window. His hot breath made a round patch of fog on the outside of the window.

Baker saw the figure's face as the flashing siren lights pulsed through the darkness. Instinctively, he clutched the shotgun, struggling to get it out of the dashboard frame. His mouth hung open and he began babbling when he realized what was happening.

The figure wore a tattered black jumpsuit and had his face hidden behind a white plastic mask. The thing's matted hair grew in patches out of his scarred scalp. Baker knew who - or what - he was dealing with. He remembered the stories he'd heard about Michael Myers.

Before the officer could pull the safety off the shotgun and fire, Michael Myers had jarred open the door and grabbed Baker's arm. Baker screamed as his body was wrenched from the car and thrown into the gravel.

Michael Myers bared his rotten yellow teeth and snarled viciously. Baker's screams were cut short when Michael Myers stomped on his face with a worn steel-toed work boot. Excruciating pain shot through the officer's head as his skull cracked like a watermelon that had been dropped off the Empire State Building. His legs twitched and his brain felt as if it had short-circuited, as the sticky, warm blood flowed out of his mouth and ears.

Michael Myers dragged the limp body of the officer into the dark clearing and pulled an ax from beneath a pile of brush.

\*\*\*

As Lori turned onto Ripley Road toward Jake's house, she pushed the automatic door lock button. This area gave her the creeps lately. She forced herself to avoid looking at the Myers house as she drove down the dark road.

She flipped on the high beams, turning into Jake's long driveway. Thick fog seemed to close in as the car crept toward his house. She could see the lights on inside.

Rock music blared from the living room so loud that the windows in the house vibrated. Lori pounded as hard as she could on the door, hurting her knuckles.

The music stopped and Jake opened the door. He'd changed into a black sweater and a pair of faded jeans. His hair was brushed back off his face. He looked different without his leather jacket on. He looked great, like he'd just walked off the set of a music video.

"Hi. I'm ready. Just let me turn off a few lights," he said.

The upstairs lights went out and Jake bounded down the stairs, two at a time. He seemed really excited to be going out, Lori thought.

She was excited too. This was kind of like their first, official date.

Lori carefully maneuvered the car around in the gravel and headed toward town. She turned on the radio and clicked the dial from her dad's easy listening music to the only rock station in town. She tapped her fingers on the steering wheel as she drove, starting to feel a little wild. "I *love* this song. I wish we could just go somewhere and dance all night long!" she exclaimed.

Jake smiled wickedly. "We could always go back to my house later. Remember? My parents aren't home and I've got the mother of all stereo systems, as you heard earlier."

She hadn't expected him to say *that* - although it didn't sound so bad.

Not bad at all.

She was tired of being the good girl, always home on time, always getting straight A's. Maybe a little trouble was what she needed.

A spark of mischief flashed in her blue eyes. "Let's do it! Let's get wild tonight!" she cried.

Jake laughed as she swerved the car from side to side down the road, singing at the top of her lungs.

"You're crazy!" he shouted, throwing his head back. "I love it!"

His hungry eyes seemed to devour her as he slid closer. "Anything goes tonight." His hot breath on her neck sent chills through her arms and legs.

Lori laughed seductively, not backing off from his heavy advances.

She liked the excitement. She punched the gas pedal down. She teased, "You're a naughty boy, Jake."

Jake suddenly sat up and pointed out the window. "Better slow down, wild woman."

He was looking ahead at the bright lights of the police car on Old Ranch Road.

She turned down the radio and straightened up in her seat. "Looks like they're still investigating. They practically blinded me with their flashlight on the way over here. At least they moved the tree out of the road."

"Yeah. Looks like it. Let's stop and see if they've got any information yet."

A little reluctantly, Lori pulled over behind the squad car beside the tree. It looked so big in the darkness. "That's funny. I don't see the officer. He was just sitting in his car a few minutes ago," she said.

Jake shrugged, "He's probably in the clearing. Let's go talk to him. It will only take a minute."

Lori started feeling a little nervous. The flashing siren lit up the foggy clearing in pulses like a giant strobe light. She didn't see anyone out there. She stopped Jake as he put his hand on the door handle. "No, Jake. Let's just go. Matt and Sally are waiting for us."

In a flash of light, a shadowed figure stood in the clearing looking at them, and then was gone with the next. "Okay," Jake agreed. "I guess they'll call us if they have any information."

As the blue sedan pulled away, Michael Myers breathed heavily. He was watching them from behind the branches of the monstrous tree that lay on the side of the road.

The radio in the police car crackled on. "Baker? You still out there? Baker. Come in." Through the flashes of light, Michael Myers draped the limp body over the giant tree stump and raised his ax. Officer Baker lifted his throbbing head and tried to scream as the taillights of the car, his last hope, disappeared out of sight. The blade of the ax descended upon his neck and crunched through his spinal cord, completely severing all ties with the world of the living. Baker's dead eyes stared out of his head, which crumpled rolled off into the clearing and stopped next to a beer can.

# CHAPTER

## 12

Jake held Lori's hand as they entered the noisy pizza parlor. Sally stood up and waved for them to come over to their booth. A group of kids from school hung out by the pool table, talking and laughing.

"Hey, you two!" Sally waved. "Come sit down. The pizza should be here in a minute. We ordered extra everything. I'm starving."

Matt gave Jake a little nod as they squeezed into the red vinyl booth. "Hey, man. How's it going?" he asked.

Jake nodded back. "Great. Things couldn't be better." He gave Lori's hand a little squeeze.

Things really couldn't have been better. He felt relaxed and... normal, sitting there with three of Haddonfield's most popular students. He noticed other kids in the place looking at them with envy.

*Envy.* He was all too familiar with that emotion.

He remembered how he used to drive by this place at night, wishing that he had a booth of laughing friends to hang out with.

Lori had a huge grin on her face. "We're going back to Jake's house later. His parents are out of town," she declared.

Matt started banging his fists on the table, chanting, "Par-ty! Par-ty! Par-ty!"

Sally rolled her eyes at Matt. "You are sooooo immature!" She looked at Jake, "Are we invited? It's not very often anyone's parents go away in this town. Especially not mine. It's like they *live* there or something! Unless, of course, you two lovebirds want to be *alone*."

Lori watched Jake. Did he want to be alone with her? she wondered.

The tired-looking waitress set the pizza on the table. Jake grabbed a slice. "Of course you're invited," he said. "The more, the merrier. Right? Besides, my house is plenty big."

Lori gawked at the greasy pizza. "Gross. This food is, like, *grease city*!"

Sally laughed as Lori picked the sausage, ground beef and pepperoni off her slice and then patted the oil off the top with a paper napkin. "Yeah! Like you should be concerned about fat!" she said sarcastically.

Lori was thin, but only because she watched what she ate and exercised. Sally was one of those girls who could eat whatever she wanted and never gain an ounce. She was always complaining about being too fat, which she certainly wasn't. Curvy, but not fat.

Matt jokingly poked Sally's side as she stuffed a bite into her mouth. "I like my women like my pizza - *big and round!*"

She shoved him back gently. "Shut up and eat, you jerk."

Matt laughed and said to Jake, "Let's go crank some cool tunes on the jukebox. This place is too dead."

The girls watched in surprise as the guys left the table, laughing and joking as if they were best friends.

Lori commented, "Jake really fits in with us, huh?"

Sally nodded. "Yeah. I'm surprised Matt's taken such a liking to 'The Lone Stranger,' as he put it. I wonder why Jake never talked to anyone before. He's such a cool guy."

Lori shrugged, "He's just shy, I guess."

"Shy? Him? Ha!" Sally snorted. "He's anything but shy. I mean, the guy is going to sing tomorrow night in front of the whole school! That takes nerve!"

Lori watched Jake standing by the jukebox. "He looks so hot tonight. Doesn't he?" She thought about what he'd said in the car. *Anything goes.*

Was he serious? Did he mean...?

Her face flushed as the words played back, over and over in her mind.

Sally laughed, watching three girls crowd in around Jake. Their flirty giggles echoed across the room. She pointed. "Yeah. He sure does. Apparently you're not the only one who thinks so."

Jake was at ease, leaning against the wall. Matt was enjoying the attention.

Sally warned, "You'd better keep an eye on him, Lori. Don't let that one slip away. You've got to keep him coming back for more."

Lori looked at her dumbly. "More? More what?"

Sally lowered her voice to a whisper. "More of you! More exciting nights, more steamy kisses, more ... you know!"

Lori's eyes widened, "You mean!... Have you and Matt... you know?"

Sally giggled. "That's for me to know and for you to never find out!"

Lori gasped, "You did! Didn't you? I can tell. I know you. When did it happen?"

Sally glanced at Matt and Jake, who were walking back toward the booth. She whispered quickly. "We haven't exactly done it... yet. But I was going to surprise him. Maybe tonight? I think I'm ready."

The girls sat silently at the table. They burst into a fit of laughter the second Matt and Jake sat down.

Matt asked, "What's so funny?"

Lori lowered her eyes and giggled. "Surprise!"

Sally kicked her under the table, hard, holding back her laughter. She looked at Matt. "Nothing. Lori's just gone a little crazy. That's all."

"Women," Matt mumbled.

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Outside the pizza parlor, a police patrol car slowly crept down the foggy street, stopping to look at the laughing teenagers sitting in the booth by the window. He pulled over to the curb and slumped down into the shadows of the car interior as he watched them. He growled, gripping the steering wheel.

It was those same teenagers again.

*Laughing.*

\*\*\*

Matt ate the last piece of pizza. "Are you guys ready to go? We've got some serious partying to do!"

"I'll say!" Lori giggled.



If he only knew what Sally had in store for him tonight, she thought.

# CHAPTER

## 13

Matt and Sally followed Lori and Jake back to the Matt house.

Lori had to squint to see through the white haze that had thickened even more since they were out earlier. Matt had his high beams on behind her, which only made it more difficult to see the road.

Lori slowed down as she turned onto Old Ranch Road, remembering the accident again. Her vision was cut down to about ten feet now. She crept along at twenty-five miles an hour, gripping the steering wheel. Matt was obnoxiously honking his horn at her from behind.

"I wish he would knock it off! This fog is too thick. I can't see anything!" she exclaimed, anxious to get to Jake's house.

"You want me to drive?" Jake offered.

"My parents would kill me if they found out I let someone else drive. Besides, we're almost there" she said.

All of a sudden the car came to a jarring stop, throwing Lori and Jake forward.

Lori screamed as Matt's brakes screeched loudly from behind. The Jeep slid to a stop less than two feet behind her.

Matt stuck his head out of the window and yelled angrily, "Hey! What's the deal, Lori!

Everything was dark. Total darkness. Thick, dark branches covered the windshield of her car. *The tree!* It was back in the road!

Jake scrambled out of the car and gawked at the giant wall of pine before them. "Oh my God! Someone pulled it back across the road!" he yelled.

Lori was freaked out. *Totally* freaked out.

They all got out of their cars and stood, staring in horrified fascination at the tree.

Sally huddled close to Matt. "I thought you guys said the police moved it to the side of the road."

"They did! But it's back!" Lori cried.

Sally gasped, "But who would..."

Jake's face became pale. "Michael Myers," he whispered.

Sally screamed, "Don't even say that, Jake! Don't even speak his name! What if he's out there, right now and he hears us!"

"Just calm down. All of you!" Matt ordered, his heart pounding with fear. "There's got to be a logical explanation for this!" Matt heard his own voice, but the "logical explanation" didn't enter his brain. He looked toward the forest, but he saw nothing but fog. Still, white fog.

*Focus, Matt! Focus!* he told himself.

He pulled himself together mentally. "Right now, we need to move the tree out of the way. We can do it if we work together. Lori, go back your car off the branches."

"Let's just turn around and go back to town," Lori whined.

Matt ignored her. "Come on, Lori. Move your car!" he yelled. He was starting to feel pretty spooked himself. The fog felt as if it were closing in on them.

Matt backed up his car onto the shoulder while Lori followed, the branches crackling as she crunched over them.

The four of them grabbed the end of the tree and strained to drag it.

Sally cried, "It's too heavy! Let's just turn around."

A rumbling filled the air and the ground seemed to vibrate.

A pair of blinding lights filled the foggy road.

A deafening horn blasted as an eighteen-wheeler barreled down the road toward them.

Jake screamed, "Pull! Pull!"

The horn blared again, the steel cab of the truck closing in on them, the tree still blocking the two-lane road. The truck driver must have seen the tree blocking the road, but it was too late to stop.

*"Pull!"*

Using all their combined strength, they dragged the tree off to the shoulder as the monstrous truck swept by, just inches from where they stood.

The whooshing back draft nearly knocked them over.

They fell on the trunk of the tree, panting. It was dead silent, as if nothing had happened.

Jake sighed, "Whoa. That was weird... Really weird. It's pretty early. You guys still want to come over? We've got some beer in the fridge."

Matt stood up, brushing the pine needles off his pants. "Now you're talking. We could all use a cold one," he said.

Lori wasn't into drinking beer - in fact, she hated the bitter taste - but she certainly didn't want to be alone right now. No way. None of them did.

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Jake opened the front door and let everyone inside, turning on the lights as they walked through his big house, bigger than Lori remembered.

Matt looked around, trying to take in all of the unusual decor and antique furnishings. "Wow. This is some place you've got here. Are you rich or something?"

Jake flipped on the stereo system and slid in a hard rock CD. "My parents do all right. They're always buying and selling rare antiques and art collections. But we're not millionaires or anything," he said.

"Killer sound system!" Sally exclaimed, running her hand across one of the four-foot-high speakers. "Check this out!" she said, opening the cabinet of a big-screen TV.

Matt stared in awe at the giant screen. "You ever watch sports?" he asked Jake.

"Yeah, a little. I mostly watch the big games, you know?" Jake said.

"Man! You could have some Super Bowl party at this place! Invite me over sometime, buddy."

Jake nodded. "Sure thing. Anytime. Hey. Who wants a beer?"

"Me!" cried Matt and Sally at the same time.

Lori followed Jake into the modern kitchen, with black tiled floors and a matching black refrigerator. Sally and Matt went off exploring the unusual house.

Lori leaned against the cold counter and smiled at Jake.

"Just a minute," he told her. He picked up the cordless phone from the counter and dialed the police department.

After a minute or so he set the phone back in its cradle. "That's funny," he muttered.

"What's funny?" Lori asked.

"The recording said that all circuits were busy. I'll try again," he said, holding the phone on his shoulder as he opened the fridge.

Lori helped Jake pour the beer into crystal glasses, which were the only ones she could find. He hung up the phone again, looking puzzled. "Still busy. Weird."

Lori held up a glass to the light. "First class," she commented.

"Nah. Those are just glasses. You're first class," he told her, smiling.

She took a sip of beer and made a face. "Can I have a soda instead?" she asked.

Jake grabbed a cola from a drawer in the fridge. "Here you go," he said.

"Thanks," she said, peering out the kitchen window into the darkness. "What happened out there tonight?" She turned to Jake, who had joined her reflection in the glass. She continued, "I mean, trees can fall, but they don't get up and move. We know someone did it. But who? Why?"

Jake's expression became serious. "You don't want to know what I'm thinking," he said.

But she knew what he was thinking, as impossible as it seemed. She knew who he was talking about.

Lori shuddered, turning away from the window. "Oh, Jake. It can't be. It couldn't have been..." She stopped herself before she said his name aloud. But the name repeated over and over in her mind.

*Michael Myers...*

*The bogeyman never dies...*

Jake said nothing. What could he say... or do? He touched her face gently. "Don't worry. We're safe here. I won't let anything happen to you. Promise." He leaned down and kissed her softly.

Lori wanted to think he was crazy.

Crazy for *believing*.

But she knew he wasn't crazy.

What if he was right?

Jake placed the drinks on a tray and carried them out to the living room.

Sally and Matt were curled up on the black leather couch, making themselves right at home.

Jake set the tray on the table and threw a couple of logs into the fireplace, then lit them with an old Zippo lighter. Jake joked, "You're probably wondering why I called you all to this meeting."

Sally took a sip of her beer. "Oh brother," she said.

Matt was thinking. "No. It's good we're all here, together. We can go over the final plans for the party tomorrow night," he said.

Lori sighed. "Yeah, really. Can you believe that it's here already? I don't even have my costume together yet!"

Sally smiled sexily. "I'm going to be Cleopatra." She stretched out across the couch and cooed at Matt, "Darling. Please peel me another grape."

Jake sat with his back against the fire. "I'm all set. The guys in the band are coming over tomorrow and we're going to load the equipment in my horse trailer. Then we'll do a quick sound check before everyone gets there. And then... showtime!"

"You have horses too?" Sally asked, obviously impressed.

The fire against Jake's back was getting unbearably hot. He pulled off his black sweater, revealing his tanned, muscular chest.

Lori sucked in her breath, hoping no one noticed her gasp.

*But he looked so hot!*

Jake answered, "Yeah. We've got a couple of thoroughbreds, but they're training right now in Kentucky. We usually let them roam around on the property, out in the pasture."

Sally looked disappointed. "Too bad. I just love horses."

Matt pointed. "Hey, man. Is that a tattoo?"

Lori and Sally dove in for a closer look as Jake showed them the small black symbol permanently carved into his back. "Yeah. That's the yin and yang symbol. It represents the destinies of all living creatures." He explained, "Yin is dark, sour and negative, representing evil, and yang is positive, bright and sweet,

representing pure goodness and light. The two balance each other, side by side, but they can't come together. Pure evil can never mix with pure goodness."

Lori nodded. "Yeah. It's like sweet-and-sour pork. You can taste both the sweet and the sour, but they don't really go together. You always taste either the sugar or the salt if you really think about it."

"Well, that's one way to put it," Jake said.

Sally looked confused. "So what about the pork? What does it stand for?" she asked.

Lori was always having to explain things to Sally. She sighed impatiently. "The *pork* doesn't mean anything. I just used it as an example."

"That's not necessarily true," Jake said. "The pork could be neutral, neither sweet nor salty. It's kind of like the Earth. You know? You can have good guys and bad guys living together on the same planet, but they can never come together as one. That's why we have wars. "

"Oh. I get it," Sally said. "So which one is stronger? Good or bad?"

Jake gave it some thought. "Well, the way I see it, they're equal. Neither is stronger than the other. But only a small percentage of people are truly on one side of the force or the other. You could say there's a lot of pork on this planet that's just *flavored* or *influenced* by one or the other," he said, laughing at his analogy.

"Did it hurt?" Matt asked, inching closer to look at the drawing.

"If you consider someone drawing on you with a razor blade to be painful, yes," Jake said, smiling.

Matt laughed. He was really starting to enjoy the evening. It was such a change of pace from hanging with his football buddies, who crushed beer cans on their foreheads for entertainment. He was actually taking part in an intelligent conversation. "You're really into all that philosophy stuff, aren't you?" Matt asked.

"You've got to believe in something," Jake said. "I read a lot. My parents bring me books and religious artifacts from all over the world. I can't get enough of it. It's like searching for the answers."

Matt was intrigued. He could feel the warmth of the fire as he sat down on the living room floor. "So, what's the meaning of life?" he

asked.

Jake shrugged. "Who knows? I haven't figured it out. I don't think anyone has."

Lori brushed her fingers across the tattoo on Jake's soft, perfect skin. She felt herself becoming more infatuated with him as each moment passed.

He was so deliciously mysterious, she thought.

Jake's body became electrified as she touched his bare skin.

Sally watched longingly as Jake stared deeply into Lori's eyes. Jake was so intense, so mature, she thought. She sat up on the overstuffed couch, remembering her own special plan for the evening.

Sally cleared her throat to get Jake's attention. "Hey, Jake. Can we go in your Jacuzzi? I noticed it earlier when we were walking around."

Jake nodded, still looking at Lori. "Sure. Go on, you two. The towels are in the guest bathroom."

Sally squealed and grabbed Matt's hand. "Come on. Let's go for a little dip."

Matt looked a little surprised as Sally led him down the narrow hall toward the back deck. "But we don't have our bathing suits," he said awkwardly.

Sally just giggled, so he eagerly followed, willing to experience whatever it was she had in mind. "Okay!" he exclaimed, his hormones raging.

Jake pulled out the hard rock disc and replaced it with an industrial dance CD. He turned up the volume and asked Lori, "You still feel like dancing?"

"More than ever," she said breathlessly.

The strange music vibrated through the house. Jake dimmed the lights and pulled her close to his chest, his bare skin pressing against her body. They moved their feet to the fast beat of the song. The electric synthesized music pumped hard.

Her heart pumped even harder.

*Jake was a great dancer,* Lori thought.



# CHAPTER

## 14

Sally grabbed a couple of fluffy mint-green towels from the bathroom while Matt pulled the cover off the Jacuzzi. Hot steam billowed up from the bubbling water. Sally peered through the window at Lori and Jake, who were dancing in the living room.

The wild music blasted throughout the house.

It was even pretty loud outside.

Sally smiled sexily at Matt as he peeled off his shirt and jeans and stepped into the hot water. "Aaaah. This is perfect. The water, the music... you," he said.

Sally licked her lips as she stared at Matt's bare chest. She unbuttoned her blouse and slipped off her skirt, leaving only her underwear on. She covered herself with the towel and tossed it aside just as she sunk into the water, the bubbles coming up to her neck.

She touched his knee playfully with her toes. "Tonight," she whispered, "I'm ready."

Matt groaned as he pulled her into his arms. His mind went wild with excitement. He raised his arms and looked up at the sky. "There is a god!" he exclaimed.

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After a few songs, Lori and Jake collapsed on the leather couch. Jake peeked outside, where he caught a glimpse of Matt and Sally kissing passionately in the hot tub, their arms entangled around each other. He laughed. "Looks like they're going for it out there."

Lori sat up, giggling. "I figured they would sooner or later. They've been going out for a long time."

"You mean... this is their first time?" he asked.

Lori blushed a little. "Yeah. I think so."

Jake pulled Lori on top of him across the couch. His body felt so strong and hard. He stroked her soft hair and untied the red ribbon.

Her long hair fell down as she leaned forward to kiss him.

He whispered, "So, how long are we going to wait?"

Lori groaned as Jake's warm hands pulled her face to his. "I don't know. Let's talk about it later." She kissed him as her body flooded over with new, exciting sensations.

\*\*\*

Matt breathed heavily as he struggled to unhook Sally's bra. He couldn't *believe* what was about to happen. He'd waited so long for this moment.

He'd dreamed about it—a lot.

Sally waited patiently as he struggled with the skimpy garment. She kissed his ear, making his whole body shiver.

Suddenly the sky lit up like broad daylight all across the property. A deafening siren began screaming.

Sally and Matt jumped out of the Jacuzzi and quickly tried to dry off. "What's going on?" she screamed.

"I don't know," Matt gasped.

\*\*\*

Jake leaped off the couch. "It's the alarm! Someone broke through the perimeter! It goes off when the fences are touched. My parents installed it to protect the race horses! Lori, go tell Matt and Sally to come inside!"

Jake ran into the kitchen and picked up the telephone. He dialed the police department.

Lori did as she was told, feeling totally confused. She yelled over the wailing sirens at Matt and Sally, who were comically struggling to put on their clothes over their wet underwear. "Come inside, you guys!" she hollered.

Jake held the phone on his shoulder as he punched some buttons in a black box on the wall. The sirens stopped.

Matt and Sally burst in the back door, their eyes wide with shock. Matt's heart was pounding heavily. "What was that? What's going on?" he huffed.

Jake was talking on the phone, still punching the beeping buttons of the alarm system.

Lori turned off the stereo and took a deep breath. "It was the outside alarm system, to protect the horses."

Sally pushed her wet hair off her face. "But he said the horses weren't—"

Jake returned to the living room and threw the phone on the table. "I just reached the police department. They said we should leave the house right now. They're on their way over, but they said we might be in danger!"

Lori cried, "They said to leave? Oh my God! This is scary!"

Jake ran and locked the back door, grabbing his sweater from the floor. "Let's go!" he shouted.

On the porch Matt helped Jake lock the door. "You can stay at my house, Jake."

"Thanks, man," Jake told him as he pulled the key from the lock. He took one last glance at the pasture, which was lit up like a baseball stadium.

Matt followed Jake's eyes beyond the white fences. He didn't see anything out there. "Jake, let's go," he said, tugging at his arm.

Sally stood by the Jeep, shivering from the cold and fear. "Hurry up, Matt! Come on!" she screamed.

"Go in Lori's car, Sally. We'll follow you home. Jake's coming with me!" Matt yelled.

Lori started her car and sped down the driveway. Matt and Jake followed close behind in the Jeep.

\*\*\*

The fog had lifted a little.

At least Lori could see the road now. Her stomach tightened into knots as they passed the Myers house.

Sally squeezed her eyes shut and said a little prayer, shivering in her cold, damp clothes.

On Old Ranch Road Lori saw the tree coming into view, still lying on the side of the road. She pressed her foot on the gas and kept it there until they got back into town. Matt's Jeep was still behind them.

A police squad car raced down Main Street, going the opposite direction.

Lori sighed a little breath of relief as she swung the car into Sally's driveway. Matt pulled over to make sure she got inside safely.

Sally gave them a little wave and disappeared into the house.

Matt and Jake followed Lori back to her house, and watched her garage door close before they left. "Wow! That was intense! So do you think someone was trying to rob your house?" Matt said.

Jake still clutched Lori's ribbon in his hand. "I don't know. One time a deer set it off, but with all the weird stuff going on lately, I'm not sure."

Matt pumped him for more information, trying to make logical sense out of the bizarre occurrences. "What did the cops say? Why did they want us to leave?"

Jake yawned. He was tired, despite all of the action. "They didn't say why. They just told me to get out of the house immediately."

Matt slapped Jake's shoulder. "Well, they better have had a good reason. I almost made it with Sally! Talk about bad timing!"

Jake sighed, thinking about what might have happened with Lori if the alarm hadn't have gone off. "Yeah, I know what you mean."

*Maybe it was going too fast,* Jake thought.

Matt pulled the Jeep up by the curb and put it in park in front of his medium-sized white house.

A police patrol car rounded the corner with its headlights off. The driver flashed a bright light in their faces.

"Hey! Wait!" Matt called, waving his arms.

The patrol car kept driving down the street.

Jake shrugged. "They probably followed us here to make sure we arrived all right."

"Yeah. Whatever," Matt said.

## CHAPTER

### 15

#### *Halloween Day*

The school cafeteria buzzed with excitement. Everyone was caught up in the spirit of Halloween, still talking about what they were going to dress up as. The cafeteria cook had even dyed the mashed potatoes orange.

Sally and Matt sat at a plastic table by the cafeteria window. Matt poked at his meat loaf and potatoes. "I can't believe you talked me into eating here. The food is disgusting. We should have gone to Jumbo Burger."

"I told you, we have to wait for Lori," Sally said. "So eat your food like a good little boy and we'll take off in a minute. I hope she was able to get permission to miss fifth and sixth period."

Lori opened the glass door and spotted Matt and Sally. A group of football players groaned longingly as she walked by wearing a black Lycra bodysuit with a short denim jacket. Lori felt liberated and free today, ready to face the future, whatever it held.

Lori waved her pink permission slip at Sally, smiling. "Hi, guys. We're out of here."

"We should have just ditched," Matt mumbled, tossing his plate of food in the trash.

Lori looked around. "Have you guys seen Jake today? I've looked everywhere," she said.

"Oh yeah. I forgot to tell you," Matt said. "I dropped him off at his place this morning so he could load up his sound equipment. He's probably down at City Hall right now testing it out." Matt fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a piece of paper. "He told me to give this to you, Lori. He said you'd know what to do with it."

It was Marsha's check!

Lori giggled. "Great. What am I supposed to do with this?"

Matt shrugged. "You figure it out. I'll go pull the car around in front of the school and pick you guys up in ten minutes. I got here

late and had to park way out in the boonies."

A couple of cheerleaders bounded over to Lori and Sally as they were about to leave the cafeteria.

The one with the mane of dark, curly hair asked, "Is the party still on or what? We heard a rumor that your band is playing at Marsha's instead and that the whole haunted house thing has been called off. That's what she's been telling everyone."

Lori assured them, "That's why they're called *rumors*. The Scream Factory is on and the band is playing."

The cheerleader tossed her hair back. "Great. We'll be there. Just wanted to make sure."

Sally's blood had nearly reached the boiling point as she forced her hand to give a little wave to the cheerleaders, who bounced off, discussing their costumes. How *dare* Marsha try to sabotage the party after all their hard work!

Sally pointed. "Over there. Look!"

Lori turned around. The glass door swung open dangerously with a crash as Marsha and three of her friends walked in as if they owned the place.

A group of freshmen scrambled back from the floor by the door, hastily moving their books and lunches out of Marsha's path.

Her calculating eyes scanned the room, stopping on Sally. Her deep-red lips mouthed the word, "Loser."

Something in Lori snapped. She couldn't—no, she *wouldn't* put up with Marsha's crap anymore.

Without thinking, she jumped up on one of the cafeteria tables and waved her arms.

"What are you doing! Are you crazy?" Sally screamed.

Everyone was staring!

*Everyone!*

Lori continued, banging two lunch trays together. "Can I have your attention please?" she yelled. The room instantly went dead silent as all of the students watched. Their mouths hung open in shock.

Lori cleared her throat, forcing her voice to be steady. "Thank you. In case you were wondering where the happening party is tonight, it's at City Hall. You may have heard rumors that it's been canceled

or that the band is playing another party. I'm here to tell you that the band is playing and the party is on!"

The football players who had been watching Lori earlier began clapping and hooting until the rest of the crowd joined in. "We'll see you all tonight at The Scream Factory!"

Marsha stared in total horror as Sally jumped up on the table with Lori. Sally added, her voice almost too loud, "While I have your attention, I'd like to take this opportunity to present the bonehead of the year award!"

The crowd screamed with laughter. Sally continued over the rumble, "Lori... May I have the envelope please?"

The kids began drumming on the cafeteria tables. Sally turned around to face Marsha, who was frozen in shock. Her friends had ducked into the bathroom, leaving her standing there alone.

With a sweeping game-show-hostess gesture, Lori handed Sally the check that Marsha had written to Jake. Sally held it up for all to see. She explained, "This is a check written by a certain *someone* who tried to *pay off* our band to play at her *private party*, depriving you, the people, of an awesome, free concert!" Sally pointed at Marsha. "And this year's bonehead award goes to ... Marsha Miller! Let's give her a hand!"

The kids booed and hissed as Marsha's eyes frantically searched for a way to escape the humiliating scene.

Sally tore the check into tiny bits and let them flutter to the ground.

Marsha was horrified by the taunting jeers from the crowd. Her mortified expression turned to pure evil.

She hurled her salad at Sally. It whizzed by Lori and hit a girl at the next table squarely in the face. Lo-cal ranch dressing dripped from the girl's glasses. Howls of laughter echoed throughout the room.

Someone screamed, "Food fight!"

Marsha sneered, bearing her teeth. "I'm going to kill you, you little —" Before she could finish her obscene sentence, a chocolate milkshake exploded against her dress. She screamed and went running into the bathroom.

Lori gave Sally a high five as they jumped off the table to escaped the storm of mashed potato globs and sandwiches that flew from every corner of the room.



# CHAPTER

## 16

Sally, Matt and Lori lugged several large shopping bags, full of candy, fruit punch and paper cups, through the entrance of City Hall. The old woman behind the desk pointed proudly at about twenty carved jack-o'-lanterns that sat around the floor of the lobby. She smiled, "I carved them myself," she said. Sally

"Thanks," Lori said. "They look great!"

"I'll help you kids set up the refreshment tables," the old woman offered. "I know you've got lots to do before the party begins."

A loud electrical sound boomed throughout the lobby. The old woman clasped her hands over her ears. "Ooooh! I can't stand that... that noise that you kids call music!"

Lori laughed, realizing that Jake was in the basement with his band. "Thanks a lot for your help," she called.

The basement had been completely transformed. Spiderwebs and horrible-looking monsters filled every corner of Matt's brilliantly designed maze.

Jake must have finished it up this morning, Lori thought.

A strobe light flickered and smoke poured out of a fog machine that was tucked beneath two filing cabinets. Lori, Matt and Sally smiled at one another as they traveled through their finished maze toward the pumping music that kept starting and stopping from the back of the basement.

They spilled out at the end of the maze into a large, cleared area, designated to be the giant dance floor, right in front of the band.

Inside the storage cage, Jake was talking to a lanky young guy with a long black ponytail about the song lineup, which they had written on a sheet of paper. A black curtain hung across the back of the chicken-wire storage cage. The guy sitting behind the drum set with a short blond flat top, twirled a drum stick skillfully in his fingers while the chubby bass player plucked a few deep chords.

Jake looked up from the sheet of paper and swung open the cage door to greet Lori. His white T-shirt was damp with sweat.

Lori gave him a kiss. "Wow! This place looks awesome!"

Jake turned to his band members. "Yeah. Thank these guys. After we set up the stage, they helped me finish decorating the rest of the place."

The three guys in the cage nodded and went back to their discussion of the song lineup.

Mayor Jamison appeared from the end of the maze as the kids chatted. "Looking good!" he exclaimed. "You kids have done a fantastic job. Fantastic!"

Sally smiled proudly as she fished the petty cash envelope from one of the plastic bags and placed it in the mayor's chunky hand. "Here you go. On time and under budget. There's still forty dollars left over."

The mayor pumped her hand. "Well done. You kids just keep the leftover money. I really appreciate your hard work and for coming through on this project," he said. His eyes darted nervously around the room. "Do you think the teenagers will come?"

Matt stepped forward. "Everyone at Haddonfield High will be here. It's the talk of the school. There's never been such a big Halloween bash in this town, ever!" he said.

Something the mayor thought of sent chills down his spine. He shivered as a few beads of sweat formed on his balding head. "Halloween," he said, looking at the kids, trying to smile. He forced a laugh. "This time of year just makes me a little nervous. You know, all the crazies come out." He loosened his tie.

"Don't worry," Sally assured him. "We won't let anything happen to the files down here."

The mayor whispered to himself, "*It's not the files I'm worried about...*" He looked at the kids. "Okay. I'll check in with you later."

Lori watched the mayor duck under a fake cobweb and walk back into the maze. She whispered to Jake, "Something's wrong with him. He seems really upset. I'm going to see if I can find out what's really going on."

Matt had begun unfolding some card tables at the edge of the dance floor. "Sally," he called. "Come help me."

Sally joined Matt as they set up candy, cookies and punch at the tables.

Jake's drummer shouted, "Come on, Jake. We need to rehearse the set."

Jake squeezed Lori's hand. "I've gotta go. I'll see you later."

Lori silently disappeared through the maze. She caught up with the mayor and tiptoed a few paces behind him all the way up to his second-floor office. He fumbled through his suit pockets, fished out a large ring of keys and opened his office door, unaware that he was being followed. Just before his door closed, Lori stopped it with her hand and slipped inside. She crouched down behind the mini-refrigerator in his office. The mayor nodded to Police Chief Grandy, who was sitting before his cherrywood desk.

The door clicked shut behind Lori. It was too late to leave now. She was frozen in place, afraid that she'd be caught.

Mayor Jamison sat down, rubbing his hands together nervously. "Things are under control in the basement. I want extra police security over here tonight. Did you make an arrest yet?" he asked anxiously.

Grandy rubbed his temples, exposed by a receding hairline. "Not yet," he said. "We found the abandoned squad car early this morning on the north side of town." His expression became twisted in disgust. "We found Officer Baker's... body a few hours later in the woods." Grandy looked as if he were going to be sick. "He was hacked to pieces," he whispered. He paused for a moment as a wave of grief and fear washed over him. "Michael Myers... is back..."

*He's back?* Lori's stomach knotted up.

The mayor's voice boomed. "You crazy son of a—That boy's long dead! You need to lay off the booze, old pal!"

Chief Grandy nodded, his expression eerily serious. "I've seen his work before—too many times." He paused and drew in a long breath. "We've either got the real thing on our hands or one *hell* of a copycat killer."

Mayor Jamison mopped his forehead with his sleeve. He slammed his fist on the desk. "I don't care if you've got Charles Manson out

there! I want a head on a platter! We can't afford to lose anyone else to this psychopath!"

Grandy shifted nervously in his seat. "All units are on the case. I'm considering calling a citywide curfew tonight. Vandalism reports have been flooding our switchboards. They're all the same—a jack-o'-lantern with a kitchen knife stabbed through. I think the killer is trying to warn us."

"No! No curfew!" Jamison exclaimed. "We can't panic people. Besides, the kids will be safe here and you're not even sure what's going on out there. One dead cop and a bunch of freaking jack-o'-lanterns don't mean squat! It's taken me ten, long years to get this damned ghost town back on its feet after—"

Grandy stood to his feet and sighed heavily. "All right. But if anything happens tonight, it's your funeral," he warned. "I'm going to drive by the old Myers place to see if I can find anything."

The mayor poured himself a glass of Scotch with shaking hands.

Lori carefully opened the door and slipped into the corridor before they noticed that she'd been eavesdropping.

*The police car last night!*

*The alarm at Jake's house!*

*The tree!*

*Michael Myers was trying to kill them!*

Lori almost tumbled down the basement stairs as she ran to find her friends.

"Sally! Matt!" she called into the basement. The music drowned out her voice. She ran through the maze to the dance floor, where Jake and the band were rehearsing their new song. She waved her arms wildly! "Jake! Come here! Jake!"

The music halted and Jake stepped out of the storage cage. "What's up?" he asked.

Her eyes were filled with terror as she told him what she'd just overheard. "Where are Sally and Matt?" she asked anxiously.

Jake put his hands on her shoulders. "They just left to buy more candy. Are you sure the mayor wasn't just playing a joke on you?"

"He didn't know I was in the room!" she cried. "Oh, Jake! What are we going to do?"

A twang of terror rippled through his body. He'd always sort of believed the stories, but not really *accepted* them, as he was now being forced to do.

He pulled Lori to the side of the stage and wiped a tear from her eye. He steadied his voice. "Listen, Lori. We'll be okay tonight. I promise. There's safety in numbers. The whole school will be here."

Lori looked into his eyes, thinking that he looked boyish and vulnerable right now. She could feel his fear.

The spike-haired drummer tapped impatiently against his snare. "Hey, Jake!" he shouted. "Come on, man! We haven't rehearsed in two weeks!"

Jake whispered, "I gotta go now. Don't worry. We'll be fine."

Lori clasped his hand. "But..."

The chubby bass player smirked as he sent out a subtle warning by playing the first verse of the Funeral March.

Jake repeated himself firmly. "I've got to go, Lori." He shook his hand loose from hers. "We'll talk about it later."

Lori didn't like being shoved aside. Especially right now.

"What is with the attitude, Jake?" she shouted, startled by her own voice. "We could be in serious danger and all you care about is playing rock star!"

Her comment hit him like a kick in the crotch.

She wished she could take it back.

He stared at her coldly as his band members chuckled in the background.

The drummer teased, "You gonna let that *groupie* treat you like that, man?"

"Yeah really! *Brenda* would kick her skinny little butt if she heard anyone talking to you like that!" chimed the lanky guitar player.

*Brenda?*

"Who's Brenda?" Lori demanded.

In a singsong voice, the drummer teased, "She doesn't know about Brenda!"

"Shut up, man! Just shut up!" Jake shouted. He felt like screaming. Lori was waiting for him to say something—anything. She stood with her hands on her hips. Anger flashed in her eyes.

He faced Lori, his expression blank. "She's no one. Just a girl I know," he said.

The guys burst into a fit of laughter at his explanation. The drummer was slapping his knee and laughing like a maniac.

The guitar player threw back his long black hair. "Maybe you'll find out who she is tonight, honey," he cracked.

Jake's face turned crimson and he wished he could run out of the building. "Oh God! You didn't invite her! Did you?"

The guitar player smirked. "We didn't think you'd mind, *Jakey poo!* You didn't tell us about your little sweetie. Besides, you *know* how crazy Brenda is about you!"

The guys were giggling hysterically.

Jake felt as if the room were closing in on him. This was the worst! The *last* thing he needed was for Lori and Brenda to be together in the same room. He hadn't told Lori about her, but then, it never came up. He hardly even knew Lori. And Brenda! Whew! She was *something else* all right! He should have warned Lori, but things were going so good. Too good.

What a total disaster!

Lori choked back tears of humiliation. "You'd better rehearse. But don't practice the selfish, vain, rock star bit. You've already got it down," she said coldly.

And to think she'd thought they had something!

Jake threw his hands up in the air as she stalked across the room. He called, "Aw, come on, Lori! Don't listen to those jerks! They're just fooling around! You've got the wrong idea! Lori!"

She didn't turn back to look at him.

"Thanks a lot, you stupid idiots!" he yelled at the guys. The drummer imitated Jake and whined, "Lori! Lori! Please! Come back!"

In a rage, Jake threw the microphone stand across the stage. The guys suddenly became serious and very quiet.

"Hey, man. We were just screwing around," the chubby bass player offered softly.

Jake kicked at some imaginary dust on the stage floor with his black Doc Martins.

*Nobody understands me!* he thought.

*Nobody.*

Everything I am, everything I do is misunderstood, he thought angrily.

He picked up his microphone. "Hit it, you freaking scumbags!"

The band went into a hard-rock number. Jake screamed out the lyrics, venting his frustration and red-hot anger.

# CHAPTER

## 17

Matt and Sally walked through the parking lot. The October moon peeked out over the trees as the sun cast its last rays of daylight over Haddonfield.

Sally read over the last-minute shopping list again. "Okay. We still need eight more bags of candy and ten more cans of green fruit punch, the lemon-lime kind. If they don't have green ..."

Matt finished her sentence. "If they don't have green, get orange," he said, feeling a little annoyed.

Sally wrapped her arms around his waist. "Sorry, Matt. I'm just a little excited. I want to make sure everything is perfect, and we're running out of time."

Matt flashed a smile at her. "Everything will be just fine. I'll go get the stuff, stop by my house so I can change into my costume, and be back at six."

Something caught Matt's eye as they walked toward the Jeep. Something was wrong, something was—

Matt gasped, "What the...!"

Sally screamed.

The vinyl windows of the Jeep had been slashed to ribbons. Matt went blind with anger as he stomped around to the driver's side.

He screamed out a long string of angry curses.

The writing couldn't be missed.

The word "REVENGE" was scratched across Matt's red paint job in huge, scrawled letters. He let out another string of curses as Sally whimpered.

"Why?" he screamed.

Sally didn't say a word as she stared in horror.

What could she say? There was no explanation for this!

Poor Matt, she thought. He'd worked so hard to restore the Jeep. It had meant so much to him. All his hard work ruined, absolutely trashed.



Before Matt could grab his keys, he noticed that the door lock had been pried off. He opened the door and there, on the passenger seat, sat a jack-o'-lantern. The acrid, rotting smell invaded his nostrils. He glared at its grinning face as if it were laughing at him.

Laughing right in his face.

In a burst of rage, Matt hurled the giant pumpkin across the parking lot and watched the pulpy orange burst as it exploded against the asphalt.

Sally winced, looking away from the sickening mess. "Marsha did this," she said.

Matt whirled around. "*What* is this hang-up you've got with Marsha? Marsha didn't do this! Are you *crazy*? Look at it! My car is trashed! Some total psycho did it!"

Sally was on the verge of tears. She'd never seen Matt so angry before and he'd certainly never been angry at her. "I'm telling you! It's just like what I found in my locker! I'm sure she did it!" she declared.

Matt really looked furious now. A large vein throbbed in his neck. He shouted, "Since when do you know Marsha so well? How do I know it's not *you* who did this? Maybe you're trying to blame Marsha because you're jealous and you want to make me hate her!"

Matt's comment made Sally's temples pulse with anger. How *dare* he suggest that she was responsible!

Sally threw her hands in the air. Had everyone gone insane?

"Oh, great! So now you're taking her side? This is just great! Thanks a lot, jerk! Maybe you should just go to her party tonight!" Sally spat.

Matt climbed into the Jeep and slammed the broken door, which flung back open, only making him angrier. He slammed it again and punched the steering wheel. "Maybe I will!" he yelled.

They glared at each other in silence for a moment. Matt punched his fist through the tattered plastic window and was quiet again. He looked at Sally, who was nearly in tears.

"Get in," he said, starting to feel like a real jerk.

"No!" she said and pouted. "Not until you apologize!"

"Fine!" he shouted, the anger welling up inside. "Be that way!"

Sally stomped her foot on the ground, totally frustrated. "Fine!"

Matt threw the pink duffel bag at her, the one that held Sally and Lori's Halloween costumes.

His tires squealed as he screeched out of the parking lot, leaving Sally behind in a cloud of smoke. He wasn't quite sure where he was going or what he was going to do yet. He just needed some space. He needed to drive

"Don't forget the candy, you jerk," Sally whispered as Matt disappeared down the road. She burst into tears.

She thought, *What a rotten night this was going to be.*

# CHAPTER

## 18

Matt screeched through town, jolting to a stop at every red light. He cranked up the radio and beat his fist against the dashboard to the rhythm of the screaming rock music.

He didn't care. The Jeep was trashed!

*Damn it!*

Matt made a left turn onto Old Ranch Road and punched the gas. The wide open road made him feel a little better. He unrolled his window and let the crisp air blow through his hair. He took a deep breath of the pine scent from the forest that blanketed both sides of the highway.

*Sally's never going to forgive me*, he thought. He'd known all along that she had nothing to do with the vandalism. He'd just wanted to blame someone.

*I'm such a jerk!*

Matt saw the towering pine that had nearly killed them last night, still lying on the shoulder.

He thought about Sally and what had almost happened in the Jacuzzi last night. He had to get back and apologize to her. He'd stop and buy her some flowers on the way back, he decided.

Matt remembered that he still had to buy the candy and green fruit punch. He made a right onto Ripley Road and headed toward the supermarket that was a few miles down.

Matt slowed as he passed the old Myers house. A police car was parked outside with the windows rolled down. The rotting old house cast an eerie shadow across the weeded yard in the early moonlight.

What was going on in there? he wondered, pulling to the side of the road. Maybe the officer inside would take a vandalism report on his car.

Matt hesitated before getting out. The house seemed to be warning him to stay away. He shook his head in an attempt to clear his mind. He threw on an oversized denim shirt and followed the path of broken stepping-stones around back.

"Hello!" he called, walking through the side yard.

No answer.

Matt approached the back door, which was sealed off with banners of yellow police tape: POLICE BARRIER—DO NOT CROSS

"Weird," he whispered, as goose bumps popped up on his skin. "I'm outta here," he said to himself.

The house was giving him the creeps. Matt had never listened to the stories the kids told. He believed in checking things out for himself, and so far he'd seen nothing to make him believe in ghosts and ghouls and the bogeyman. Just some stupid, creepy pranks. That's why the police were here, he rationalized.

Matt's sneakers crunched in the dirt as he started back around the side of the house. The officer could be anywhere. In the woods or even next door—

"Hey!"

Matt jumped at the sound of a deep voice that snapped like a whip crack. He looked up and saw Chief Grandy staring down at him from the second-story window. "What are you doing here, boy?" he demanded, eyeing the teenager with suspicion.

Matt caught his breath, his heart pumping furiously. "I just saw your car parked here and wanted to see if you could take a vandalism report real quick. Someone trashed my car today. It's sitting out front," he said.

Grandy sighed. "Your car, huh? Okay, son. I'll be right down to take a look."

Anxious to get away from the house, Matt went and leaned against the Jeep.

Minutes passed.

"What is he doing in there?" Matt wondered, looking at his watch impatiently. *Sally's really going to be steamed if I'm late*, he thought.

Matt called out, "Chief? Are you coming out?"

The wind picked up, whispering through the forest.

Matt's feet led him back to the front porch. He carefully stepped around the caved-in boards and pushed the front door open. A wave of musty, mildewed air made him cough. He stepped inside the eerily

dark house. He wasn't too afraid, though, with the police chief inside... somewhere.

"Chief?" he called. "I've got to go. I'm running late," he said, his voice seeming to disappear into the peeling wallpaper.

Matt gripped the railing of the staircase and carefully felt his way up by touch. The staircase groaned as he reached the top.

"Hello?" he said softly, so as not to startle the chief. After all, the man did carry a gun and probably didn't like being sneaked up on.

"Aha. There you are," Matt said with a sigh, spotting a light down the hall in the front bedroom. He followed the light through the darkness and reached for the doorknob. He pushed the door open. "Chief, I've really got to get going soon. I'm late for a party and—"

Matt froze in shock.

Through the dim, flickering light of a jack-o'-lantern, the crumpled body of Police Chief Grandy became visible, lying in a pool of fresh blood that pumped silently around the butcher knife embedded in his heart.

Matt tried to drown out the horrible sound of his own screaming. His knees became weak and his brain was unable to believe what his eyes saw. The badge on the chief's chest flashed in the jagged flashes of light.

He was dead. His glassy eyes stared lifelessly in the orange glow from the jack-o'-lantern.

*Oh God! This isn't really happening!*

Suddenly Matt heard a noise. A faint stomping sound.

*Footsteps!*

His glint of hope, that it might be help, instantly turned to terror as he realized that the sound was moving up the stairs.

Someone was in the house!

Matt's heart stopped. He could barely breathe or move his muscles. He forced himself to take a step. Instinctively, he pried the bloody knife out of Grandy's chest, and it slid out with a sickening crunch of bones.

The footsteps moved slowly and heavily toward the room.

Matt was trapped.

He could hear the killer breathing in the darkness.

Matt struggled to stay conscious. His head was spinning and his heart pounded painfully in his chest.

*This can't be happening!*

The dark figure now stood in the doorway. Matt could feel his cold, rancid breath as he growled viciously.

The figure stepped into the flickering light. His entire horrifying body, covered in a muddy black jumpsuit, was visible. Matt let out a deafening scream.

*It was Michael Myers!*

Matt's arm froze as he tried to raise the knife, horrified by the black, dead eyes watching him from behind the white plastic mask beneath a tangle of matted, wiry hair. The hideous monster raised his arms and lunged forward.

Matt jumped backward toward the bedroom window. Michael Myers lunged again coming closer and closer.

*I'm going to die!*

Using all his energy, Matt drove the knife through the eye hole in the mask. A dark stream of blood trickled down the white plastic as Michael Myers stumbled backward. Matt struggled to pry open the window. Michael Myers pulled the knife out of his eye and began slashing at the air, moving closer to Matt.

Matt jammed the window open and looked down at the concrete below.

It was his only chance.

He dove out the window, landing with a crash on a pile of boards below. Stars shone in his closed eyes for a moment as excruciating pain set in in his ankle.

He screamed out for help.

No one responded.

Matt forced himself to get up. He had to get help! If he could only make it to the Jeep.

He winced with every painful step.

The Jeep was still there, thank God! But... what was the hood doing up? *I don't remember!*

Terror filled his brain as he stared at the handle of an ax driven through his engine. A tangle of ripped wires and hoses sprouted out

from under the hood.

Never had he been so alone and helpless and *terrified*.

*Run, Matt! Run!* he told himself.

*Through the woods. Gotta get back to town.*

*Go! Forget about the pain! Run!*

Matt stumbled across the street into the black forest. The woods were the fastest way back.

Only a mile.

If he could just make it back into town... He had to make it. Had to warn the others... had to get away from Michael Myers. He disappeared into the darkness and limped toward the lights of downtown Haddonfield.

# CHAPTER

## 19

Lori sat glumly on the old brown sofa in the City Hall lobby. She wished she could just leave this place. She wanted to forget about the whole, miserable thing. But the music from the basement wouldn't let her. Every note of Jake's screaming voice painfully stuck her, like a sharp needle.

*I've been such a fool, she thought. I knew he was trouble from the moment I saw him. What a lying, two-timing creep!*

But something deep inside her mind told her that she was wrong...

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Sally took her time walking up the wide steps of City Hall from the parking lot. Her head hung low as she tried to make sense of the stupid argument she'd had with Matt. Why was he acting so crazy, she wondered. Why had he turned on her like a rabid pit bull?

She remembered the look on Marsha's face when they'd publicly humiliated her at school today. The memory didn't seem very funny now. It seemed evil and cruel. Sally was starting to regret doing it, even though Marsha certainly had deserved it.

Maybe the universe is paying me back now, balancing things out, she thought. Was that it? Or was more punishment still coming? she wondered.

Sally wiped her eyes before she opened the heavy door. She spotted Lori sitting on the couch in the lobby.

Lori was really upset about something. Sally set the pink bag on the floor and seated herself next to her friend.

Forgetting about her own problems, she put a comforting arm around Lori. "Hey, Lor, what's wrong? What are you doing up here?" she asked.

Lori gave Sally a tight hug. "Oh, Sally! I'm so scared! I tried to tell Jake and..."

She began to sob, unable to finish her sentence. Sally squeezed her hand with concern. Lori was usually pretty tough. Something was



really wrong.

"Shhhhhh. Calm down. What's the matter?" Sally asked softly.

Lori forced herself to snap out of the overwhelming grief she was feeling. She wiped a tear from her blue eyes. "I found out that... I overheard the mayor talking to the police chief and they think that... Michael Myers is back!"

Sally released her hand and sat back to look at her friend. "Oh. Ha ha! Very funny, Lori!" She rolled her eyes. "And I thought you were serious! Thanks for the scare."

Lori clasped Sally's hands. Fear and desperation filled her eyes. She whispered, "No! It's true. They found a dead cop this morning in the woods, all chopped up! Please! You've got to believe me!"

Lori wasn't lying.

This was no joke.

Fear spread across Sally's face. "Oh my God!" A picture of the trashed Jeep and the tree, and the sound of the alarm at Jake's house, flashed in her mind. And Matt, somewhere out there... Her voice croaked, "Do you think...?"

Lori nodded. "I think he's after us."

Sally was on the verge of panic as she scooped the duffel bag into her arms. "What did Jake say? Why is he still playing down there? We should get out of here right now!"

Lori stood up, feeling a little dizzy, not believing that this conversation was actually taking place. "No. Jake said we should stay here. He's right. Safety in numbers. It's too dangerous out there." Although Lori didn't have much faith in Jake right now. She didn't have faith in anything.

She glanced around nervously. "Where's Matt?"

Sally trembled like a scared little girl. "Matt's out there, Lori. Someone ruined his car and we got in a fight. He took off. I don't know if he's coming back."

She wished she could take back that last sentence.

She burst into tears, unable to control her fear any longer. "We've got to find him! Got to warn him. I can't let him—"

"Sally!" Lori yelled, suddenly feeling a surge of strength. Someone had to take charge around here, she thought. "Snap out of it!" Sally

looked at her dumbly. "We've got to fight. It's up to us. You and me."

Sally seemed to be listening. "Okay now," Lori took a deep breath, making up the plan as she spoke, "let's go put on our costumes and have this party. Everyone will be showing up soon and there'll be hundreds of us. Nothing will happen. If Michael Myers tries to crash this party, he'll be sorry."

Sally nodded her head in agreement. "You're right. Matt will be back soon and everything will be fine. He can't kill all of us," she said and laughed.

Lori smiled. "That's right. Let's go make ourselves beautiful."

The girls walked to the first-floor bathroom. Sally dumped their costumes and a bag of makeup onto the counter. "War paint," she joked.

Lori was actually feeling much better. She couldn't believe how hysterical she'd let herself get over the whole thing. Even if something did happen, the mayor had ordered extra security tonight.

She picked up her costume. A black spandex leotard and a pair of fuzzy cat ears. It was all she could come up with on such short notice.

Sally eyed the skimpy garment. "Meow! Jake's going to be drooling after you like a dog!"

Lori slipped off her denim jacket, trying to decide whether or not she should paint whiskers on her cheeks with black eyeliner. "Personally, I don't care what Jake thinks," she snapped. She explained, "We got in a fight too. He's being a real jerk."

Sally pulled her hair back and put on her black Cleopatra wig. "No way! You guys just got together! You're fighting already?" she asked in disbelief.

"Yeah," Lori groaned. "It appears that *Mr. Wonderful* already has a girlfriend, according to his obnoxious buddies." Lori pulled a pair of sheer, glittery hose and her high-heeled pumps from the bag. "She's going to be here tonight," she said icily.

"What!" Sally exclaimed. "She's coming here? To our party? Ooooh. This is totally too weird!"

"Brenda," Lori said with hate in her voice. "That's her name. The guys in the band invited her. I guess they didn't know that Jake and I were seeing each other."

"Oh, Lori. I'm so sorry," she said. An idea flashed in Sally's head. "We've got to make you look gorgeous tonight. You know, make him choose!"

Lori winced as Sally ran a brush through her long blond hair. "I don't even know if I want him anymore," Lori said.

*I'm sure I want him,* she thought hopelessly.

Sally pointed to the chair in front of the mirror. "Just have a seat and let me fix you up. We'll transform you into a sex kitten." Sally sifted through her little tubes and bottles.

"I don't know," Lori said. "She's probably six feet tall with piles of perfect curly blond hair."

Sally smiled, her Cleopatra wig sparkling in the fluorescent light. "Well, you're five-foot-seven, right? With those shoes and my curling iron, we've almost got it made! Besides, you're one of the prettiest girls at school. No one could compete with you. Except maybe me!" She laughed.

Lori felt a glimmer of hope. She was almost looking forward to meeting her nemesis. "Yeah!" she said. "Make me look like Pamela Anderson!"

Sally joked, "Hey! I'm an amateur beautician, not a plastic surgeon!"

Lori glanced at her chest and burst into a fit of giggles. "Well, there's plenty of toilet paper in here!" she said and snorted. "Maybe there is hope."

Sally glanced at her watch and thought about Matt. It was nearly six.

*Where was he?*

Sally asked, "You don't think that Matt would ditch me and go to Marsha's party, do you?"

"Are you kidding? No way!" Lori said. "Even if you guys got in a fight, he still wouldn't go there. I don't think..."

Sally remembered the way Matt had held up Marsha's invitation when he'd first received, it as if he was honored to have been invited. "Yeah. I guess you're right," she said, feeling unsure of herself. "He better come back here."

"He will," Lori said. "If I know Matt, he's probably driving around, blowing off some steam. He'll show up about half an hour late just to make you squirm. So stop worrying and get back to work!"

The girls changed into their costumes and walked through the lobby. The music from the basement had stopped and the old clerk was busy lighting the jack-o'-lanterns.

A lot of kids Lori recognized from school were milling around on the stairs outside. Everyone was dressed up in a wild costume.

Lori felt very sexy in her cat costume. Sally had really made her look good. Beneath the furry cat ears, her hair hung in loose, spiral curls down the middle of her back. Her sheer black stockings caught the glowing light of the candles.

*Maybe Jake will see me before he goes on stage, she thought.*

Lori smiled confidently at Sally. All the guys were looking at the two of them. Sally looked really spectacular. She winked at a crowd of boys and tossed her straight black wig. It contrasted beautifully with her green eyes, which she'd skillfully painted with black eyeliner. She wore a form-fitting gold dress, a snake bracelet that wrapped around her bare arm and a silver choker with a giant scarab dangling from the end.

The girls went outside and began greeting their guests. The mayor wanted to give a little promotional speech before the party and had asked them to keep everyone outside until the music started playing.

# CHAPTER

## 20

The moon was the only light Matt had to get him through the thick woods of Haddonfield. His heart pounded as he moved as quickly as possible through the dense trees. The pain in his ankle was excruciating now as he stumbled along. He tried, without much luck, to erase the horrifying image of Michael Myers from his mind as he ventured farther into the blackness of the forest. The dead eyes behind the mask seemed to be watching, following.

*Keep going! Keep running!*

No longer able to see the moon through the trees, Matt stopped. He tried to get back his sense of direction.

*Where am I?*

Nothing made any sense right now.

That's when he heard the noise behind him. The bone-crunching sound of footsteps.

*Oh God! No!*

*Come on, Matt! Keep going!* he coaxed himself.

He began running blindly. His legs became numb as he picked up speed.

The footsteps were louder and closer as his follower gained on him. Matt heard that same, unearthly growling just feet behind him. He didn't dare turn around. He couldn't do anything but run.

Without warning, Matt felt himself falling deep into the cold, wet earth. He landed with a painful thud on what felt like jagged rocks. Freezing water soaked through his ripped clothing, further numbing his pain-stricken, exhausted body.

Matt screamed as he tried to claw his way out, still unable to figure out where he was. It was so dark and black. He heard a noise from above. He looked up and screamed out in horror. His body hurt too much to move. The footsteps were above him, circling him.

The white face peered down into the ditch. Something shiny gleamed in the hand of Michael Myers as it caught the moonlight.

*This can't be happening!*

Overwhelmed by shock and pain, Matt felt himself slipping away. He struggled to fight the feeling off. He forced himself to be silent and still.

*Play dead. Don't move,* he told himself  
Metal crunched into the ground above.  
Something cold and heavy hit his face.  
*Crunch!* It hit him again... and again.  
*No! He can't bury me alive!*

The suffocating dirt surrounded Matt as shovelful after shovelful seemed to trap his broken body.

The footsteps circling above sounded distant and the image of the face seemed to grow dim as if a heavy fog were rolling in.

Way off in the distance, Matt. heard the faint sound of Mayor Jamison on a loudspeaker. "Happy Halloween, citizens of Haddonfield. Welcome to The Scream Factory! It's so nice to see all of you teenagers here tonight..."

Suddenly, the shoveling stopped. Michael Myers was silent, except for his heavy, raspy breathing. Matt saw his hulking frame turn toward City Hall. He seemed to be in some sort of a trance.

He lurched off into the woods, following the sound.

Matt gasped for air through the dirt that buried him almost up to his neck.

He knew where Michael Myers had gone and what he was going to do.

*Nooooo! Oh God! No! I've got to warn them!*

Matt struggled to free his arms from the cold dirt, thinking of Sally and all of his friends, in grave danger.

If he could only break free... He had to break free...

The pain in Matt's body seemed to fade away as the blackness began to close in around him. He could no longer fight the comforting darkness. His eyes closed and his one free hand went limp.

# CHAPTER

## 21

Mayor Jamison smiled at the crowd of teenagers who were anxiously waiting to go inside. He was very pleased with the overwhelming response to the party. He called Sally and Lori to join him at the top of the stairs.

The mayor spoke into his megaphone. "Let's give a big round of applause to these two girls, who put this whole party together for you. Come on up, Lori and Sally!"

The girls smiled proudly as the kids cheered and clapped. A few of the boys made cat calls at their sexy costumes.

Lori peered out at the faces in the crowd, wondering which one was the infamous Brenda.

The mayor thanked the girls again and turned to the crowd of teenagers. Their bodies entirely filled the massive staircase and were spilling out into the street. "Are you ready to scream?" he yelled.

The cheers and excited hoots grew even louder, filling the cold night air in downtown Haddonfield.

The mayor swung open the lobby doors. "All right then! Welcome to The Scream Factory!"

Crowds of teenagers poured into the lobby and down the basement stairs. Lori and Sally led the way.

The strobe lights flickered and fog poured through the maze. A tape of howling wind and screaming ghouls filled the air. Sally laughed as she heard some of the kids behind her jump with surprise when they saw the monsters. Their menacing faces had been placed around every corner of the maze. The old guillotine gleamed eerily between the stage and the end of the maze. Lori had personally chosen to put the monster with the wolfman head in its metal clutches.

Hundreds of bodies spilled out onto the dance floor from the narrow corridors of the maze. Matt's giant spiderweb hung overhead, holding hundreds of black and white balloons for release at the end of the night.

Lots of kids made their way to the refreshment tables and drank the green fruit punch and chomped on orange, pumpkin-shaped cookies.

Lori looked at the stage, which was completely hidden by a heavy black curtain. She couldn't hear any sound coming from behind it over all the noise. All of a sudden the scary tape clicked off and the dim lights went out. Smoke billowed through the room. Confused voices and frightened cries filled the room.

Sally grabbed Lori's hand in the darkness. "What's going on? This wasn't part of the plan!"

Lori looked around nervously. The smoke seemed to be getting thicker. "I don't know!" she cried.

Up on top of the storage cage a flashlight clicked on, lighting up the face of what looked to be the devil himself! An evil laughter filled the room.

The crowd gasped.

No one knew what to think.

Suddenly, a red light and siren flashed on and the curtain across the stage fell to the pounding beat of drums. The devil jumped off the top of the cage, landing in the middle of the stage. He screamed into the microphone as the band went into a fast hard-rock number. It was Jake! His energy filled the whole room as he climbed up and down the cage walls like a wild animal.

Lori squealed with excitement before she remembered how mad she was at him. She had to admit, it was a great trick. He'd really surprised everyone!

Sally yelled over the blasting music, "He is soooo hot! Look at him go! My God!"

The crowd began dancing to the wild music, colored lights flashed across the masked faces of what must have been a crowd of three hundred people.

Lori couldn't take her eyes off of Jake. He'd painted his face and bare, muscular chest bright red and had two horns sticking out of his head. He ran around the stage, in his skintight black leather pants with a red devil's tail sewn in back. He looked so totally sexy, she thought.



A bunch of girls made their way up to the edge of the stage and were holding their hands out to him, screaming his name and giggling. The other band members wore black T-shirts and jeans and stayed in the background, blending in with the curtains.

Lori listened to Jake's beautiful, haunting voice as he sang out the chorus of the song he'd let her listen to a few days earlier.

*I'm the bogeyman, baby, and I'll never die!  
I'm the bogeyman, baby, and that's no lie!  
I'm the bogeyman, baby, so don't even try  
To get away from me!*

Lori forced herself to look away from him. She wanted him so badly... wanted to kiss him again right now. She wished she could turn back time to last night at his house when they'd lain on the couch together and she'd felt the electricity flowing between them.

A time before everything got all screwed up, before she knew the truth.

The song ended and the room thundered with applause and screams. Jake had it all now, Lori thought: girls, popularity, talent.

There was no turning back.

A huge grin spread across Jake's face as he caught his breath after the song. He peered out into the crowd, looking for Lori, but couldn't make out anything but a sea of screaming faces.

The crowd screamed out for more.

He took a moment to introduce the band members. Jake shouted into the microphone, "Are you ready to rock tonight?"

The audience cheered and they played an old Kiss song. The drums beat furiously and the crowd danced as Jake sang.

Lori walked over to the refreshment tables and nodded hello to the old clerk, who was pouring cups of punch. Lori sat down on a folding metal chair and buried her head in her hands.

She was hopelessly miserable. She was in love.

Sally found Lori sitting by herself.

She came bounding over. "You seen Matt around yet?"

"No," Lori said, her eyes cast downward. "I can't wait until this night is over."

"What's with the wallflower bit, Lor? It doesn't suit you," Sally joked.

Lori sighed. "Duh, *Sall*. What do you think? I'm totally infatuated with the hottest guy in the room and he couldn't care less!"

Sally pushed her snake bracelet up on her arm. Her mind wandered back to her own love problems. "You'll be fine, Lori." She was silent for a moment, trying to figure out what to do. It just wasn't like Matt to totally disappear off the face of the earth.

"I'm going to call Matt's house," she declared. "I'm starting to get worried. I'll catch you later."

"Yeah," Lori said and sighed glumly. "Later."

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Sally made her way through the maze and climbed up the basement steps to the deserted lobby. The jack-o'-lanterns cast a creepy orange glow across the polished hardwood floor.

She fished a quarter out of her tiny purse and dropped it in the slot of the pay phone. She dialed Matt's number, which she'd memorized the first week they'd started dating, so long ago. How she longed for things to get back to normal. Matt was really missing out on a great party—and so was she.

*Why did he have to pick tonight to freak out?* she wondered.

Matt's mom answered. "Hi, Mrs. Hudson. It's Sally," she said into the receiver. "Is Matt there?"

Her hopeful expression became a mask of disappointment. "Oh," she answered. "Yeah, we did have a date, but we argued earlier," she explained. "I'll talk to you soon. Bye."

Sally hung up the phone and shivered. Her skimpy costume was doing nothing to protect her from the drafty cold air. "Next year I'm going to dress up as an Eskimo," she said to herself.

*Where was he?*

He hadn't even come home to change into his costume!

Sally flopped onto the couch in the lobby and stared at her reflection in the glass doors.

*Come on, Matt, you big jerk, she thought. Haven't you tortured me enough?*

# CHAPTER

## 22

In between songs, Jake looked for Lori again. He had to find her. He had to somehow explain everything before it was too late.

There! He spotted her in the back of the room!

*Come on, Lori! Look at me!*

He waved at her, motioning for her to come up by the stage.

She didn't see him.

Jake whispered to the guys in the band, "I'm making a change in the song lineup. Do 'Brenda' next."

The band went into a slow, beautiful number. Lori glanced up at the stage. Was Jake looking at her?

The crowd began breaking up into couples. They moved their feet slowly, holding each other tightly as Jake closed his eyes and sang from his heart. Lori looked longingly at the young lovers, gliding across the floor, wishing she had someone to dance with. Wishing she was in Jake's arms.

She couldn't help but listen to the sexy, sincere sound of his voice as he sang.

Jake envisioned that his voice was reaching out like a giant hand, coaxing Lori nearer.

Lori felt a strange connection. She opened her eyes. Yes! He was looking at her. She walked toward the stage. He was singing to *her*.

*I never believed in the stars above, I never believed in love  
I would never lie to you or be cruel or untrue, now it's up to you  
Make your next move on my open heart, love me or go away  
Don't leave me standing here, all by myself, for another day  
Oh, baby, what's going on in your heart?  
Oh, baby, please say we won't ever part.*

Lori pushed her way to edge of the stage and stood right before Jake. The red paint on his body was streaking off with sweat. He knelt down and clasped her hand. At that moment, she didn't care

about the fight they'd had or about his girlfriend. She was caught in the moment, the most beautiful moment she'd ever experienced.

She didn't care that the whole school was staring at her right now, or what would happen tomorrow.

He was singing to *her*, like some haunting songbird, lost in a storm. Nothing mattered.

When the song was over, Jake stared deep into her eyes and mouthed the words "I love you."

Lori's stomach fluttered, not believing what he'd just said.

He released her hand, but not her gaze.

The crowd screamed with applause.

Jake's eyes suddenly became wide with horror.

Before Lori could react, she was violently jerked backward by the hair. She hit the cold ground. She struggled to break free from the forceful flash of color that was swiping and clawing at her. She heard screams as her face was pushed to the ground. An angry voice spat horrible curses at her as the weight slammed down upon her again. Her body was pinned to the cold cement floor.

Jake leaped off the stage and pulled Lori free, wrapping his arms around her.

Lori stared at her attacker, instantly knowing who it was.

The crowd stared in shock as a strikingly beautiful girl with pale skin and a tangle of wild, black hair stood there. The girl looked confused and frightened. She wore a revealing and very sexy gypsy costume made of brightly colored silk. A gold belt dripping with coins wrapped around her slender waist. Her dark eyes burned into Jake. She cried, "That was *my* song! That was *my* song!"

Her face became a mask of rage as Jake clutched onto Lori to protect her from further harm. The girl lunged forward again, with her arms stretching out for Lori's throat. She was stopped by a security guard who burst through the crowd. He grabbed the girl and held her skinny arms as she struggled and screamed. "I love you, Jake! Don't do this to me! Please!"

Jake was too furious to be embarrassed by the fact that this stupid, crazy girl had just dragged his dirty, shameful past before the eyes of

hundreds of people. His face twisted in disgust as he looked at her wild eyes. He shouted, "It's over, Brenda! Don't come near me again!"

The girl's expression suddenly changed.

She laughed lightly and smiled at him. "Come on Jake. Don't say things like that. I know you still love me."

"I *love* to hate you Brenda! That's what I love. You're nothing. Nothing!" he said coldly.

Jake pulled Lori aside as security guards dragged the girl up the basement stairs. She started screaming again as they pulled her into the maze. The whole school stared at the wild girl who was being carted away.

"Are you okay?" Jake asked. He hugged Lori tightly. "I am so sorry. It's all my fault."

Lori's voice quivered. "Yeah, I think I'm all right... That was your girlfriend?"

"*Ex*-girlfriend," he said, correcting her. He wiped a tear from her cheek. "I should have warned you. I just never thought that she'd come after you. I should have known better. She's crazy. You know? Your song... I wrote it when we were going out. I changed her name to the word *baby* and it must have made her snap when she saw me singing to you."

Lori straightened her cat ears. "Yeah," she said. "But are you...?"

Jake looked sadly at Lori as Brenda's pitiful screams echoed through the door. "No. I went out with her for a few months last year. But she got into drugs and started losing her mind. She won't leave me alone. She thinks we're still together."

"Like *Fatal Attraction*," Lori said.

Jake nodded. "Yes. That's why I didn't tell you. She follows me around. I didn't want to scare you off."

Lori stared deep into his eyes. "What you said, on stage..."

"I meant it, Lori," he said.

The band started warming up again. Jake stood up on the stage. "We'd better get on with the show," he said and smiled.

Lori hung out close to the stage as Jake made a few brief apologies to the crowd for the disturbance.

The music started again and Lori began dancing, feeling happier than she ever had before.

# CHAPTER

## 23

A dark figure emerged from the woods and lurched toward the lights and pulsing music in the big building. He could see the flickering lights in the lobby... and that girl again. His face hidden by the mask, he moved silently through the shadows of the buildings on Main Street.

\*\*\*

Sally sat on the couch in the lobby. She watched in shock as a pretty girl, whom she'd never seen at school, was dragged across the floor and taken outside by a security guard. She couldn't imagine what the girl had done to get herself thrown out, although she did seem pretty out of control.

Sally watched through the window as the girl was thrown into the back of a police car. She sighed and walked to the pay phone, determined to find Matt. She dialed 411 and got Marsha Miller's number.

The phone swallowed another quarter and she dialed.

\*\*\*

Outside the huge building, music vibrated against the basement windows. The smell of sweat from the dancing teenagers inside wafted out into the cold night air. He could hear their blood pulsating and their shrill voices laughing. The shadowy figure jarred open a metal box and ripped a handful of red and black wires from their roots inside.

\*\*\*

Sally felt a knot of anxiety. What if Marsha answered? What would she say to her?

One ring, two rings, three rings.

*Click.*



Sally tapped the receiver. "Hello!" She tapped it again. The phone line was dead silent on her end.

"Great!" she said and sighed. "The stupid phone decides to stop working!" Sally stuck her fingers in the coin return slot. "Where's my quarter, you crummy thing?"

Sally was startled by a thundering bang on the glass doors outside. She whirled around to see who it was. By the time she'd turned around, no one was there.

She stepped cautiously, toward the doors, which had been locked after everyone came in earlier. Her gold high, heels clicked as she moved across the polished floor. She'd hate to close out a latecomer.

Sally pressed her hands and nose against the shockingly cold glass to peer outside. The street was deserted.

Where were the other security guards anyways? she wondered.

Just as Sally was about to turn around, a white face slammed against the glass, its dark, cruel eyes laughing.

Sally screamed and jumped backward five feet.

*Please! No!*

The horrible thing in the white mask clawed at the door with such force she was sure the glass would shatter.

Her heartbeat pounded in her ears, drowning out all other sounds.

The police sketch of Michael Myers flashed through Sally's panic-stricken mind.

"Somebody! Help me!" she screamed, backing away from the glass that threatened to break.

The thing kept pounding and clawing, desperately determined to get inside, its hot breath steaming up the glass...

No one could hear Sally's cries over the blaring music. She was totally alone with... Sally squeezed her eyes shut as the growling thing ripped off its mask, revealing—huh?

Marsha Miller!

Outside, Marsha howled with laughter, gripping the white mask in one hand and a gleaming butcher knife in the other. She stuffed the mask in the pocket of the oversized black jumpsuit she wore.

Marsha high-fived three of her girlfriends who had emerged from the hedges, laughing with her like a bunch of maniacs.

Sally was so relieved that it was only Marsha, she went ahead and opened the doors. She had been so shocked, it took a moment for the anger to set in. But as soon as she realized that the cruel joke had been planned for her, everything became red-hot.

Sally's nostrils flared. "Of all the low-down, dirty, cheap, tasteless pranks!" she screamed.

Marsha sneered, "Oh, look, girls. The wrath of Cleopatra! Watch out!"

The snide, snobby attitude called for an equally cheap shot. "At least my party wasn't a bust, you pathetic loser!" Sally remarked.

Every bit of remorse that Sally had felt for humiliating Marsha fell to the floor.

Marsha growled with an evil gleam in her eyes. "For your information, my party was canceled by the police!"

Sally laughed, knowing she'd hit Marsha where it hurt. "Oh yeah? Did they see your ugly face and decide it was just a little too scary for Halloween?"

Marsha's painted red claw poked Sally in the chest. "I told you! They called it off and made us come here to your geek factory!"

Sally didn't believe her. She knew that no one had shown up at Marsha's party and she was lying to save face. "Sure, Marsha," Sally remarked sarcastically. "We all know why you really came here. You came to—"

Unexpectedly, Marsha pushed Sally backward, causing her to lose her balance. She hit the ground, landing on her rear end. "If you think I'm here to pick up on your loser boyfriend, you've got another think coming!" Marsha glared at her.

Sally didn't dare move as Marsha's friends closed in on her, as if they were going to beat her up right there. She looked up at their masked faces in disgust. What cowards they were!

They all laughed at her as they disappeared into the basement.

Sally picked herself up off the floor, trying to brush the dust off her golden dress.

She had a sudden horrible realization.

Matt couldn't have gone to Marsha's party because Marsha was here!

*He was missing!*

The dim overhead light in the lobby flickered for a moment and faded out, as if someone had flipped the switch.

\*\*\*

A flash of blue and orange sparks showered from the power box in the shed behind the huge building. The dark figure, shrouded in darkness, waited silently as the power groaned off and the lights went out. Frightened young screams poured through the basement windows.

# CHAPTER

## 24

In the dark woods, Matt opened his heavy eyelids. He didn't know how long he'd been knocked out, but his head was still throbbing. He forced himself to stay calm as reality set in. His mind was flooded with nightmarish images. Matt was still in the ditch. Still covered with mud. The sharp pain still pulsed through his body.

But he was alive!

He held his breath for a moment and listened carefully to his surroundings. The wind whispered through the trees.

He was alone now.

With his final reserve of energy, he began wiggling his fingers, then his wrists, then his arms to loosen the heavy blanket of freezing dirt that had nearly suffocated him. Sweat dripped from his fevered head as he got an arm loose and then his leg.

*Have to get out. Have to warn the others—if it's not too late.*

Matt had freed his pain-wracked body from the dirt. He grabbed onto a twisted tree root that reached out across the ditch. Slowly, he was able to pull himself out by climbing up the tangled nest of roots and branches.

At ground level, he stared down into the deep hole in the earth that had nearly become his early grave.

The rusted shovel was missing.

Michael Myers was gone.

Matt limped through the woods by way of moonlight. The lights of downtown Haddonfield came into view. The City Hall building was right there... right—

The lights were out! The building sat quietly, outlined only by the glow of the full, October moon. Something was wrong.

Matt traveled as fast as he could, wincing with each painful step. He knew where Michael Myers had gone.

# CHAPTER

## 25

The music came to an abrupt stop and the flashing dance-floor lights clicked off. The power groaned, winding down with an eerie sound.

A ripple of surprised laughter trickled across the crowd. Everyone knew it was another Halloween trick. Just part of the show. The crowd watched the stage and waited for Jake to appear again.

But minutes, feeling like hours, passed and the lights didn't come back on and the music didn't start up again.

Total, suffocating blackness had engulfed the room.

Panic swept through the basement as people pushed and shoved to get out.

Jake cursed as he felt along the ground for his flashlight. Finally, he found it and flipped it on.

Lori cried out from the crowd, "Jake! I'm right here!"

A wave of relief swept over him when he saw Lori's beautiful face. He bounded out of the storage cage and took her by the hand.

\*\*\*

Sally wasn't too concerned about the overhead light. The twenty jack-o-lanterns still gleamed brightly. But the music had stopped in the basement.

*This is freaky.*

They must have blown a fuse down there, she thought.

But Sally had bigger problems on her mind than the music. She had to find Matt.

"Maybe he's already here, in costume or something," she mumbled, trying to ease her worried mind.

Sally decided to try calling Matt's house again. Through the glass doors, she could see a phone booth across the street. She didn't like the idea of going out into the cold, but she had to know that Matt was safe.

She ran down the stairs of City Hall and across the street. All of the businesses on the deserted street were closed now. Sally stepped into the glass booth and closed the door. The dim overhead light flickered, threatening to go out at any moment. She dialed Matt's number again and glanced across the road at the entirely dark City Hall building.

Matt's mom answered and was just as startled as Sally was that he was still missing. Sally promised to have him call home as soon as she found him.

A loud squeak against the glass doors made her whirl around in surprise.

Sally opened her mouth to scream before she realized she was in no danger. She looked with disgust at that silly, familiar face as it peered inside the phone booth.

Sally yelled furiously, "Do you think I'm a total idiot, Marsha? Your immature trick isn't going to work again!" Sally reached out to open the door. "You don't know when to stop! You-"

*Oh my God!*

Sally gasped, suddenly realizing that the horrible face peering in at her didn't belong to Marsha. The hulking body of the monster outside was the size of a full-grown man. Mud was caked on his black jumpsuit and matted hair. Fresh blood was spattered across his dirty, white plastic mask.

It was no costume.

It was real.

Sally screamed. Every nerve in her body was electrified with adrenaline as she lunged forward, bursting out of the phone booth.

*This can't be happening!*

Michael Myers grabbed Sally by the hair with a dirty gloved hand and raised his rusted shovel with the other. Sally screamed as she wriggled out of his firm grasp. The bobby pins that held her wig in place ripped strands of hair from her scalp. She ran like a bolt of lightning across the street and up the stairs. She sobbed with terror and didn't dare look back as the heavy footsteps of Michael Myers followed her brisk pace in the darkness.

Sally flung open one of the doors to City Hall and slammed it shut behind her.

The only thing standing between Sally and Michael Myers was a quarter-inch piece of glass that bounced back as he pounded against it.

Sally turned around, fumbling to find the deadbolt switch.

Dead eyes locked upon their prey. The unearthly, evil voice vibrated through the glass and penetrated her very soul.

Before she could snap the deadbolt into the lock position, he held up the gleaming shovel. Michael Myers rammed the metal pole through the outside handles of the door, locking Sally inside.

Then he lurched into the shadows around the back of the building.

Sally ran screaming to throw open the basement door.

Jake caught a glimpse of light from the candles in the lobby and Sally standing in the doorway.

"He's out there! Michael Myers is out there!" she screamed, jumping up and down as if her feet were on fire. Unimaginable terror swept through her body as she tried to warn the others.

Jake and Lori could see her shouting, but her voice was drowned out by the rumble of the crowd.

Something was really wrong and everyone in the room could feel it. It was no joke this time.

Sally's hysterical crying swept another wave of panic through the crowd. Kids pushed and shoved toward the exit. They knocked over filing cabinets and stepped over each other in a mindless stampede.

Jake yelled out at the top of his lungs over the massive confusion: "Stop!"

He stood up on top of a filing cabinet and waved the flashlight around. The room became silent except for a few frightened whimpers and muffled cries. "Follow me!" he ordered. He took Lori's hand as they walked along the wall of the maze, leading everyone toward the lobby.

# CHAPTER

## 26

Sally grabbed a jack-o'-lantern and carried it through or a security officer - or anyone! The light from her pumpkin cast a nightmarish tunnel along the dark corridors as she screamed out for help.

\*\*\*

The mayor sat in his office, desperately trying to dial out for backup. He'd known that something was terribly wrong when the lights went out. He slammed down the receiver of his dead phone.

In the dark, Mayor Jamison fumbled through his desk and found a key-chain squeeze light. He gripped the tiny light in his sweating palm.

His knees felt rubbery as he stood up from his desk. He was barely able to walk.

He shone the tiny beam of light along the walls of his office as he backed out toward the corridor. His deteriorating heart pounded in his chest and threatened to burst. He heard the far-off voice of a girl screaming, somewhere in the building.

Heavy footsteps clunked down the hallway toward the door of his office. He called out, "Who's there!"

No one answered, sending a silent shock wave through his body.

The footsteps came closer, pounding against the smooth tile floor.

Cautiously, he poked his head out into the narrow corridor and felt an icy draft. The footsteps had stopped and all he could hear was the sound of his own wheezing. He could see the moon shining through the open window at the end of the hall.

The mayor froze in terror, clutching his pain-wracked heart. Michael Myers stepped out from the shadows and moved forward with his arms raised.

The mayor let out a bloodcurdling scream.

The blade of the gleaming butcher knife crunched through the mayor's rib cage and slid into his heart. Fresh, red blood seeped from the gaping wound. The mayor let out one last desperate cry as he



struggled to remove the knife that protruded sickeningly from his chest. The last thing Mayor Jamison saw was the horrifying face of Michael Myers looming overhead before everything went white. His heavy, broken body dropped to the floor with a crash. Michael Myers jerked the bloody knife from his chest and listened.

Listened to the desperate screams of a girl.

# CHAPTER

## 27

Matt nearly collapsed from exhaustion as he stumbled toward the City Hall building, which was shrouded in complete darkness. He struggled to pull the back door open. He cursed, realizing that it had been locked from the inside.

He had to get inside!

He felt his way around the side of the building and found the broken basement window. Matt reached inside through the shards of broken glass and pulled the release off. A sharp pain shot through his shoulder as he jerked his arm out. Blood spread out across his shirt from the fresh cut. He pushed the window up and slipped his body through the opening. He was unable to see the ground below.

The heat from the crowd felt steamy and thick as he released his grip on the windowsill and fell down. He landed with a violent crash on the refreshment table in total darkness.

The crashing noise startled the panicky teens, causing a deafening uproar of confused voices.

Matt stood up and slipped along the wet floor in a pool of sticky fruit punch. He pushed his way through the crowd in the maze and up the basement stairs.

In the candlelit lobby, kids screamed as he limped by. Matt was completely covered in mud. His clothes were ripped and torn to shreds and the blood from the cut soaked the sleeve of his shirt.

Matt spotted Lori and Jake, who were ushering people up the dark staircase into the spacious room.

Lori gasped, "Oh my God! Matt! What happened to you? You're bleeding!"

Jake pulled Matt aside. He tried not to look too shocked by his ghastly appearance. "What happened, man? Here, sit down a minute," he said in his most soothing voice.

Matt leaned against the wall, wincing with every painful breath. "He's here!" he shouted. "Michael Myers is here! We've gotta get everyone out! It's a trap!"

Jake stared at Matt for a moment. He didn't want to believe what he was hearing. Jake whispered in a hushed voice, "Here? Now? You mean...?"

Matt nodded painfully. He looked desperately into Jake's eyes. "He attacked me in the woods and he killed Chief Grandy." The feeling of panic escalated as his eyes darted around the dim room. He cried, "Where's Sally? Oh God! Where is she?"

Jake had a sinking feeling in his stomach. He hadn't seen Sally since she ran off screaming like a banshee. "I don't know. Something... scared her and she took off running. I'll go find her, you stay here and rest."

A far-off scream echoed through the long corridor. It was Sally!

Matt leaped to his feet. "Oh God! I've got to find her. Get everyone outside!"

Jake agreed and made his way through the crowd to the doors. He pushed hard. He pushed again, using all his strength.

Then he saw the shovel wedged through the handles.

They were trapped!

Matt followed the sound of Sally's screaming voice. He was getting closer. He could make out the words: "No! No, no, no, no!"

"Sally! Sally! Where are you!" he hollered.

Matt found her huddled in the corner of the hall. She was hugging her knees and singing to herself like a child.

"Sally!" he yelled. She cowered back into the shadows. Slowly she looked up and saw a mud-covered figure towering before her. She tried to scream, but no sound came from her dry throat.

"It's Matt," he whispered, realizing he'd nearly scared her to death.

"Matt," she whispered, on the edge of total hysteria. She wrapped her arms around his neck and held onto him for dear life. "He's here! Michael Myers is here! We've got to get out!" she cried. Sally pointed in the darkness. "He's dead!"

*Dead!*

As Matt cradled her head and brushed her hair from her face, his foot touched something warm on the floor. He strained in the darkness to see what it was. To see what had made her freak.

The glow from the pumpkin illuminated a large lump in the doorway. Matt felt the warm object. Then he realized that he'd just grasped a lifeless hand!

*The mayor! Oh God!*

Matt yelped out, "Let's go!" He jerked away from the bloodstained linoleum floor and the dead body. He led Sally through the darkness, dragging her by the hand.

As they skidded around the corridor toward the lobby, Matt caught a glimpse of something through the window.

He stopped and waved his hand to silence Sally.

"Come on!" she pleaded. "We've got to get out!"

Matt stood with his back against the wall and peered outside. He froze in horror.

In a flash, he saw Michael Myers lurching through the shadows around the back of the building. "Shhhhh! He's outside!" Matt whispered.

What was he planning?

Matt was totally confused. His heart was pounding in heavy thuds of terror. Michael Myers had been inside and then outside. He must know another way to get in the building.

The broken window flashed through Matt's mind.

He whirled around, pulling Sally behind him. "He's outside!" he huffed. "We've got to keep him there."

In the lobby, Jake yelled out, "Now!" as four football players rammed the couch against the glass doors with a thundering boom.

The glass bounced, but didn't break.

Matt pushed his way through the middle of the room. "Stop!!!" he screamed. "Michael Myers is outside! Everyone stay in here!"

The crowd, packed inside, shoulder to shoulder, began whispering in terrified voices. A girl dressed in a clown costume cried out, "I want to go home!"

Jake had the muscular boys set the couch down as he tried to plan out the next move.

There wasn't room for everyone in the lobby.

Kids still pushed their way up the staircase in a desperate attempt to get out. Some of them were still stuck in the maze and on the

dance floor.

Lori was pressed against the wall, feeling as if she were going to suffocate.

Matt whispered to Jake, "We've got to stop him. The basement window is open!"

Suddenly, a new bout of hysterical screaming could be heard from downstairs.

# CHAPTER

## 28

Jake pushed his way down the stairs and through the maze. The screaming was coming from the dance floor. He stood on top of a filing cabinet and shone his flashlight through the room, where he saw a dark figure drop down from the basement window. A wave of masked faces rushed from the far wall toward the maze, knocking down the filing cabinets like a row of dominoes.

Jake was thrown off balance. He landed painfully on the cement floor. The sound of screeching metal mixed with screams filled the room.

Jake kicked the thin metal box hard with his boots and climbed out from beneath a warped empty filing cabinet. Carefully, he climbed over the mess and made his way toward the dance floor.

The scene reminded him of a riot he'd been stuck in at a rock concert last summer. Panicked bodies flew from one side of the room to the other, pressing together with the force of crashing waves.

Jake was terrified of what he might find as he reached the nearly deserted dance floor. He shone his flashlight across the crying, masked faces. He knew what he was looking for. The horrible face.

*Michael Myers.*

Suddenly, the giant spiderweb across the ceiling came crashing down on top of him and fifty other people. Hundreds of black and white balloons filled the air.

Screams rose up as the kids struggled to release themselves from the giant tangle of woven rope. Their bodies were pinned against the ground and their struggling only tangled them worse.

Jake swung his flashlight around in an attempt to see the end of the giant web. Maybe he could somehow pull it off and break free.

Horror stabbed through his entire body as he shone the beam of light across the stage.

Inside the storage cage were his three band members, their bodies hanging lifelessly, their necks sticking out at sickening, crooked

angles. Blood dripped to the stage floor and their eyes were glassy and cold - and dead, as their broken bodies swung.

Jake screamed out, "Nooooooooo!" He fell to his knees. Complete suffocation of hopelessness and defeat washed over him. Jake forced himself to look away from the stage. Every bouncing white balloon looked like the face of Michael Myers. Fear struck through Jake's heart as the balloons all seemed to blur together. A new breed of fear had entered his mind, one he was sure he'd never forget.

If he lived through this night...

\*\*\*

Lori stumbled across the wreckage of the basement, searching for Jake. She was able to make out the white outline of the spiderweb that lay on the ground. The trapped bodies seemed helpless, like tiny flies.

"Jake!" she screamed. Her voice was drowned out by cries of pain and terror.

# CHAPTER

## 29

Upstairs, Matt and Sally were pressed tightly against the wall. People were pounding on the glass doors, trying to jar them open despite Matt's protests.

Suddenly, the horribly disfigured Michael Myers lurched up the stairs into the eerie, dark shadows of the lobby. Sally was slammed against the wall by a force of scattering bodies desperately trying to move back.

Hysteria swept through the room.

There was no one there to save them.

Michael Myers stood at the top of the staircase, holding a rusted gasoline can in one hand and a burning jack-o'-lantern in the other. Hell had arrived.

Shrieks of terror swept across the floor as he emptied the can of flammable liquid across the walls and drapery.

Choking gasoline fumes filled the room.

Matt screamed, "Jump him!"

No one moved.

They were all helplessly frozen.

Matt looked at the gleaming pumpkins that sat on the floor. Gasoline dripped off the walls, dangerously close to the flames.

As if in slow motion, Matt felt his body moving across the room. He was blinded by terror and rage, but he kept moving closer and closer.

Michael Myers stepped forward toward him and clasped his huge hands around Matt's throat. Matt gasped and struggled with all his strength and pushed the two of them backward down the stairs. They tumbled into the darkness.

A jack-o'-lantern was flung against the wall, igniting a gasoline-soaked curtain. The lobby lit up in an orange blaze. Terrified people shrieked for help as they clawed and beat at the windows and walls.

Without thinking about the consequences of her actions, Sally fought her way through the crowd and the smoke and went tearing



down into the basement after Matt.

In minutes, she thought, the whole place would go up in flames.

She found Matt lying on top of a twisted filing cabinet. The flames from upstairs cast a horrifying light across the basement. Sally could see a few struggling bodies still tangled in the web and the balloons bobbing through the room.

She looked at Matt and then back at the kids trapped on the dance floor. There wasn't time to help them now, she decided.

She pulled Matt to his feet and glanced around the room. Her body was numb with fright.

Michael Myers was nowhere to be seen. He'd disappeared into the maze.

"Come on!" Sally screamed.

They felt their way along the back walls of the building, around the dance floor. The smoke was growing thicker and the fire was spreading quickly.

Matt hoisted Sally up through the basement window. She pulled herself through roughly, and dragged her leg across a broken shard of glass.

Her leg throbbed painfully as she stood up from the cold muddy ground. She looked down and saw a bloody gash through her ripped gold stockings.

Sally peered back inside, where Matt yelled to her, "Open the back door! You pull and I'll push!"

Sally frantically searched for the back door in the darkness. *There!*

She grasped the handle and pulled on the emergency release with all her strength while Matt pushed. The door flung open and Matt escaped outside. A few others ran out after him.

Matt and Sally ran around to the front of the building and climbed the massive staircase. They moved toward the glass doors, where they saw the screaming, desperate faces pressed hideously against the glass. The people inside were banging and clawing to get out of the burning, smoke-filled room.

Matt yanked hard on the shovel, releasing the doors. A stampede of teenagers and clouds of thick, black smoke poured through the doors.

Just as everyone escaped, the lobby ignited into a total blazing inferno.

Sally heard wailing sirens in the distance and almost breathed a sigh of relief - before she remembered that there were still people trapped in the basement.

There wasn't time to wait for the authorities. Michael Myers hadn't come out and Lori and Jake were still inside!

Sally screamed, here eyes wide with fear. "Matt! We've got to go back inside! Jake and Lori are missing!"

Matt nearly collapsed from exhaustion, but forced himself to be strong, to go on.

Sally and Matt ran around again to the back of the building. Her golden dress glowed in the orange light as they raced past the flames.

Smoke and heat drifted through the broken window and under the back door.

As they entered the basement, they could see the flames licking across the walls and filing cabinets.

\*\*\*

Lori stood over Jake on the dance floor, screaming as she tried to free him from the giant spiderweb. Balloons began bursting from the intense heat, sounding like rounds of machine-gun fire.

Three girls writhed beneath the ropes. Sally saw Marsha Miller's panicked face staring up at her from beneath the web.

"Don't let me die! Please! Don't let me die like this!" Marsha begged. Her face was blackened with smoke and soot.

Sally touched her hand briefly and shouted over the rumbling, "I'll get you out, Marsha! Hold still and stop struggling! Matt! Help me lift this thing!"

Together, Matt and Sally lifted the giant web, freeing Marsha and her friends who were caught underneath it. A loud explosion boomed through the basement as a filing cabinet ignited and burst. Thousands of burning papers scattered through the air. Miniature fires broke out all over the basement.

Lori screamed, "Help me! Help me get Jake out!" as she ripped and clawed at the nylon ropes. She didn't even notice that her raw hands were bleeding.

Marsha stumbled to her feet and put on her Michael Myers mask to protect herself from the thick, acrid smoke. She tripped on the remnants of the net and fell to her knees. Her friends blindly ran out of the smoke-filled basement without her.

The huge building creaked and a large, burning beam crashed to the ground with a shower of scattering sparks. Burning embers and debris pinned the nylon ropes to the floor. Jake was trapped beneath them.

The net ignited at the far end of the room.

Lori kept tugging, doing everything she could to set him free.

*He can't die! Not after everything that's happened. Not now!*

"I'll get you out, Jake! I promise!" she cried, coughing from the smoke.

Sally screamed at Marsha, "Get out! Hurry!"

Marsha stood up and looked around the burning room in total confusion. Her eyes fixed on Matt. "Matt! Please save me!" she cried.

\*\*\*

A hulking figure emerged through a cloud of black smoke. Matt struggled to get Jake untied.

And then he saw him.

Michael Myers was coming at them. The glimmer of the knife shone brightly in the fiery light.

Matt screamed as Michael Myers moved closer and closer. Another blazing support beam crashed to the ground behind him. He screamed, jumping back out of the way. The scene was too nightmarish to be real.

But it was real. This was really happening!

Matt had an idea. It was their only chance.

He ran and hid behind the guillotine and quickly tore off the silver duct tape, revealing a razor-sharp blade. The metal was almost too

hot to touch. He stood on the other side of it and waved his arms wildly.

He screamed out over the burning rumble, "Hey! Michael! Over here! Come and get me!"

Sally looked up from the hopeless tangle of rope and saw Michael Myers through the thick, black smoke slowly making his way toward Matt. It was a vision that she would never be able to erase from her memory.

She shrieked, "Matt! What are you doing! Nooooo!"

Marsha Miller appeared out of the smoke. She stumbled behind Michael Myers, toward Matt.

Matt continued to untie the release handle as Michael stepped forward into his trap.

Michael Myers stopped.

Sally screamed, "Marsha! Get out of here! Go that way! Run!"

Michael Myers whirled around to see Marsha standing behind him. The flames danced curiously in his black eyes for a moment. Marsha let out a chilling scream as she spun in a circle, searching for a way out. Michael Myers grabbed her by the head and snapped her neck backward with a bone-crunching crack. Her body fell brokenly to the floor.

Then Michael Myers began lurching toward Sally and Lori.

Matt had to think fast. Had to get him to go the other way.

Come *this* way! he cried silently, panic filling him.

He picked up a jack-o'-lantern and hurled it at Michael Myers, hitting him with a jarring force. Michael Myers stumbled around, swaying slightly. He began walking toward Matt with the knife firmly gripped in his hand.

Matt was numb with terror as Michael Myers stepped closer and closer. He squeezed the release cord of the guillotine tightly in his hand.

Sally screamed and ran forward, shoving Michael Myers directly toward the guillotine.

The hulking figure lunged forward and raised his arm to drive the knife into Matt's furiously beating heart. Matt released the cord and

the blade of the guillotine dropped with a screeching metal-against-metal sound. Michael Myers suddenly looked up at the falling blade.

Blood spattered across Matt's face as Michael Myers sank to the ground. The thick blade was embedded through the center of his mask.

Matt stumbled backward and gagged at the horrifying sight in the hellish inferno. Blood filled the eye holes of the mask and the flames reflected back at him in the two dark red pools.

Fire was engulfing the entire room.

In another minute the place was going to collapse in on itself.

Matt grabbed the knife from Michael Myers's hand and stumbled through the cavern of burning beams toward Sally, Lori and Jake. They coughed and gagged as they tried to release Jake.

Matt screamed at the girls, "Get out! Run!"

Sally had to tear Lori away from Jake. Lori's hand was painfully jerked from his.

Tears streamed down her cheeks. "I love you," she cried as she was dragged away.

A window exploded from the heat and shattered glass crashed to the floor. Sally and Lori covered their faces with their hands and stumbled across the dance floor.

Outside, they gasped, gulping in the fresh air. They collapsed to the ground and held each other, sobbing, waiting and watching the door.

# CHAPTER

## 30

Inside, Matt began sawing at the ropes around Jake. The pain in Matt's lungs became nearly unbearable as he inhaled the hot, burning smoke.

The flames were just a few feet from where Jake was trapped. At last, Jake was able to tear away the tangle of ropes that pinned him down.

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The sirens grew louder as the red and yellow fire trucks arrived at the burning building. A battalion of firemen in yellow suits rushed toward the flaming basement.

"It's too hot in there! It's gonna go!" the chief shouted.

Lori stood up screaming in the flashing lights. "There's still two people in there! You have to save them! You have to-"

She fell to her knees as the building groaned deafeningly.

The paramedics dragged the screaming girls away from the inferno door.

Sally let out a bloodcurdling scream. "Nooooooooo!"

\*\*\*

Inside, Matt threw his shirt around Jake's bare chest.

"This is it!" Matt yelled. "It's now or never!"

Together, they faced the wall of flames that towered before them.

Jake yelled back, "Now!"

They charged through the flames, holding each other up as they crossed under an impossibly burning tunnel of rubble.

They reached the door and came bursting out, clawing for air. Matt and Jake laughed with relief as they fell on the cool grass.

They were alive!

They had made it!

A hideous explosion of flames breathed out the back door, spitting out a giant jack-o'-lantern. It rolled to a stop before Matt and Jake. The blade of the guillotine was wedged through its sneering face.

The boys' laughter came to an abrupt halt as they sucked their breath in with horror. They stared widely at each other in shock, knowing that Haddonfield had not seen the last of Michael Myers.